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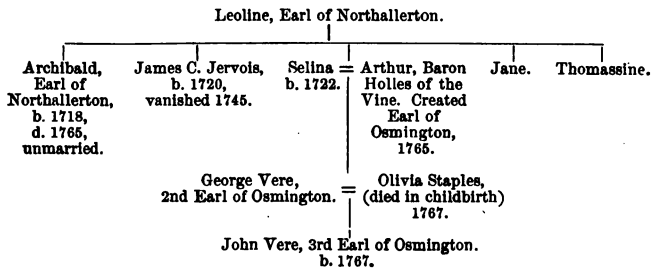
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EXCERPT FROM PEDIGREE.



ABIGEL ROWE.



CHAPTER I.

BATTLE MAGNA.

ON a certain evening in the autumn of 1808, the westering sun glittered, with the ripe redness that precedes setting, upon the casements of an antique dwelling. The fine old manor-house of Battle Magna was erected by Sir Leoline Jervois, in the reign of James I.—that identical Sir Leoline who was Chamberlain under Elizabeth, and who, succeeding his childless brother, became, in course of time, Earl of Northallerton and lord of vast estates in the counties of Lancashire and York. Having completed the stately edifice to his satisfaction, he had the honour of receiving there his Majesty himself, when on a progress through the West Riding; and the King was heard to mutter, with a shade of envy, that 'twas better to be a great English noble than a monarch, since the former may live as he pleases in his feudal

palace, and lay his head upon the pillow without dread of the assassin. The house had seen many a strange sight since that far-distant day, many a sumptuous pageant, magnificent *fête*, and stately funeral; had passed through a chequered series of vicissitudes, and bore upon its weather-beaten face the scar of many a wound. On the tops of the towers which flank the broad façade may be discerned, tipped with rays of sunset, by you who gaze on them, the rows of brass culverins wherewith the heroic countess defended her abode, in the absence of her lord with Charles. How picturesque is the crumbling pile in its antiquity! Its rambling front of hoary grey is pierced by latticed windows with quaintly leaded panes; its high-pitched gabled roof of mouldering tiles would be red, but for a rich parterre of many-coloured lichens; its immense chimney-stacks of fantastic form seem to tell of roaring fires at Yule, of revels, wassail, unstinted hospitality. But that was long ago; for, to all appearances, the house is almost deserted now. The balustrade which stretches above the projecting porch is broken here and there, its tessellated pavement cracked; and the embayed window, that gives access to the ample balcony, is shattered in one place, the rent patched up with boards. A single ray of light shimmers through shutter-chinks on the ground floor; one blue thread of smoke rises straight into the still

air. Ichabod! Prosperity has departed. Like Sir Leoline, who piled these stones one on another, there is naught left of flaunting splendour but dust and ashes. The steps leading to the terrace are green from want of use; the sculptured coronets and armorial shields, whereon the Jervois' maunch is quartered with the leopard of Plantagenet, are chipped; the panels of the door gape from lack of paint; its florid hinges are tawny with rust. 'Tis but a pallid ghost of happier days, a phantom of vanished glory.

And yet, singularly enough, although the mansion is neglected, the surrounding grounds are neat and trim, showing that the owner, if careless in the main, can still display a vestige of respect for the old place. These gardens, indeed, are celebrated throughout Yorkshire. The venerable yew-hedges, which enclose a square space of lawn below the terrace, are smoothly clipped; so are the arches pierced at intervals; while the turf of less sombre green is close as velvet. A series of verdant slopes descends to the brink of the brawling Fosse, which is fringed by an unkempt growth of wild currant bushes, laden with blushing fruit. At this point the stream is permitted to meander as it wills, 'twixt blocks of stone over a pebbly bed, lingering in shady nook to form a pool, home of the glancing trout; then sparkling, singing on under the jocund sun, until in wayward wandering it stays once

more to rest, or flashes, humming, rippling on its journey towards the sea. But a bowshot distant from the house the wanton is grappled and coerced by hand of man; cribbed, bridled, buckramed into starched shapes and straight canals, squared into mimic lakes or crescent ponds, surrounded each by a turf border. Marble deities, standing upon islets, are mirrored on its glassy breast; while sheets of brown beech-leaves, like little rafts, the golden relics of the passing year, float undisturbed in corners, or beneath the arches of a bridge. The noble owner of Dutch William's time was bitten by the prevailing mania for canals and tulips, but he took the horticultural epidemic in a mild form; for while the low-lying plateau was handed over to stern gardeners who stifled nature, the adjacent heights were left in wild luxuriance, where grand Scotch firs were permitted to mingle their russet bark and spikes of silver with vivid beech and feathery limes; with gaunt, tall, black cypresses and dense horse-chestnuts. So varied a panorama as that which enchants the eye from the terrace fronting the manor-house is scarce to be found among the numberless splendid domains of our British nobles. The valley of the Fosse, wide elsewhere, is narrowed here in semi-circular shape, confined by abruptly rising and broken ground into the form of an amphitheatre. In the centre of the flat plateau rise the ruins of a Cistercian abbey crowned

by a mighty tower. The spectator, from the terrace where he stands, can mark the line of cloisters, the fretted work of church and dormitory veiled by wreathing ivy, the abbot's house, the pilgrims' caravansary,—all the details of the huge establishment suppressed by Henry VIII., a parish in itself, covering sixty acres. He can trace the windings of the river, playing bo-peep among the interlacing foliage, until it reaches the place of its imprisonment; count the temples that look from out the woods; mark the many walks, so cunningly disposed to charm the wanderer with unexpected vistas—glimpses of ever-changing loveliness. At the extreme end of the valley, as far as eye can reach upon the left, the silhouette of a town is visible against the sky, a mass of red roofs perched on a hillside, Ripon Minster's flattened towers dominating all. Then, closer, the nestling village of Stratton-on-the-Fosse; and, closer still, an undulating park, where red deer herd 'neath spreading oaks; and, closer yet, the green plateau, with its marvels of Dutch gardening—a tranquil Eden. Birds and beasts bask in the open without fear. Yonder, where Norway spruces rear their pointed heads a hundred feet and more, squirrels, as red as Rufus, gambol on the grass, with bushy tails erect, dart up the tree-trunks, skip along waving boughs with the hardihood of unchallenged possession, as though these forest giants had been planted there as exercising

ground for pigmies ; while across that flight of dripping stairs, down which the stream pours on incessantly to the lower level of a little lake, fastidious water-hens pick their dainty way, like high-born dames, afraid to wet their feet. No shouts, no whistling of ploughboy at his work, no human discord, mars this calm oasis in the world's fretfulness. The twittering of finches, the drawling caw of rooks as they summon their fellows homeward, the ceaseless babble of the singing Fosse—these are the sylvan spells that to solitude add silence, and lull the world-worn soul to blissful rest.

On this particular evening, which must occupy our attention now, the domain of the squirrels was invaded by three intruders. On the parapet of the first bridge, some distance from the manor-house, two ladies sat, their shadows lengthening upon the path, as they listened to a narrative related by a maiden. One of these ladies was tall, beetle-browed, thin-lipped, with a bold countenance, that puckered itself into smirks as she glanced now and again at the other, with such an air of deference as a companion shows to her employer. The other, aged about forty, was stout, painted, raddled, with a large head and short neck, a quantity of light hair gathered in an untidy knot under a monstrous beaver hat, quick, beady eyes deep-sunk in their orbits, and a scarcity of clothing ill-suited to so overblown a figure. A lilac-

silk pelisse was negligently open, displaying a short-waisted robe of thinnest sprigged muslin, through the lower part of which was plainly visible a pair of thick ankles and wrinkled stockings. This lady commanded attention by reason of her peculiar appearance. The jewelled bracelets on her rough arms seemed to intimate that she was a person of importance, which suggestion was corroborated by a sharp, querulous manner, as of one who is accustomed to obedience; but, then, on the other hand, her attire was of the crumpled, flashy kind which is worn by vulgar drabs. The stockings of common thread were wofully unclean, and the low shoes of primrose satin were unlaced and not innocent of holes. She tossed off her hat with an impatient puffing gesture, and ran through unbrushed locks a set of short, fat fingers, much beringed, that stood sadly in need of soap, and remarked to the rawboned lady, with a foreign accent—

“How funny such a paradise to have no master!”

“Beg pardon, ma’am,” the young girl said, who was standing in front of the strangers. “Battle Magna belongs to my lord Osmington, and he’s here now.”

The foreign lady started. “That wicked, bad man! Mon Dieu, quel étrange hazard! Come, Ambrosia, let us go away.”

“He won’t come out,” remarked the girl. “Yonder

light gleaming across the sward shines through the shutters of the library, where they are dining. There are several guests stopping with my lord, and when gentlefolk dine, they drink far into the night."

"Guests? And the house so *délabrée*, like one, what you call, in Chancery."

"In sooth, my lord deigns but rarely to come hither," the girl said. "We have it usually to ourselves—me, that is, and cousin Cyrus, and grandaunt Pentecost, and the bats and owls; and 'twill tumble down ere long. I shall be sorry, for I love to wander in the corridors, and invent stories for the solemn people with ruffs in the pictures. But I love the landscape, too—the woods and meadows, and the capricious Fosse, which tells me such tales as I lie on the bank with my ear close to the water. You never heard such tales!"

The olive cheek of the maiden flushed, and her dark eyes danced as she thought of the hours spent beside the darling stream; and the untidy stranger, amused by her naïve enthusiasm, remarked, with a hoarse laugh—

"What are you called, so dark-skinned? You must be a Bohemian, a gipsy; yet you talk as one educated."

"I'm called Abigel Rowe, and I'm fifteen, and my father was a gipsy," responded the damsel. "But I'm an orphan, with no friends at all but cousin

Cyrus and grándaunt Pentecost Smalley, and the tame rabbits. She's housekeeper, you know—not that there's much worth keeping, after long years of such neglect—ever so old, and cross and crabbed; but Cy takes my part when she slaps me. Not but what I can hold my own, for that matter."

"You look as if you could," laughed the foreigner. "Ah me! if this fairyland were mine, I'd live here, and fly from all my torments."

"*He* doesn't," whispered the girl, with mystery, "because it doesn't belong to him."

"Hearken, Ambrosia, to the little sphynx! A riddle. How—it does not and it does?"

"Maybe I weary your ladyship with my clack," the girl said timidly, frightened by the discordant laugh and the forbidding aspect of the thickly blackened eyebrows.

"Non, non, ma mie. Our carriage at your village will not yet be mended. It is better to sit here than in the dusty street, where all the people stare. Go on."

"This place, then, ma'am, is the ancestral home of the Northallertons."

"One of the oldest families in England!" ejaculated the thin person, named Ambrosia. "Let me see. Wasn't it an Earl of Northallerton who so distinguished himself when the English beat the Scotch in 1188? You remember, madam. We went

over the field yesterday where they fought the Battle of the Standard. The title, I think, is extinct."

"Yes," the girl said, with a sigh. "The last lord was Archibald, who died a bachelor forty years ago. He had a brother and three sisters."

"Is that so?" asked Ambrosia. "Why, then, did the brother not inherit?"

"Because, when only five and twenty, he was embroiled in a duel about a certain baroness, and in his excitement and inexperience fired before the word was given, and killed his antagonist. For this he was accused of murder, but never tried; for, fleeing to Ireland, he threw himself on the compassion of a relation of the lady's, who housed the fugitive, gave him a small farm, and made of him his factor. No great kindness that to one so nobly born, but it served to save him from the bloodhounds. The soldiery sought high and low in vain; and Archibald gave out, for the honour of the family, that he had in desperation joined the Scotch at Derby ('twas the year '45), and been slain. When Archibald died, another search was made for his legitimate successor, but nothing came of it. The fugitive himself was dead—really this time, at least so it was understood—and the search was directed, therefore, towards the finding of such offspring as he might have left. But what could they expect to discover about one so poor and sunk in rank? This unfortunate brother, whose

name was James Christopher, had had naught to live on in banishment but his scanty wage, and his children, if he had any, must have gone into service, the sons as labourers, the girls as kitchen wenches. Those who travelled to Tipperary to prosecute the search brought back information that was deemed sufficient. Ancient Irish folk were still living, they declared, who swore that James had possessed one child, a son, who in childhood perished of the small-pox. It was well established that half of the population were swept off by the scourge. True or not, the story was believed, and, the title becoming extinct, the property passed to the eldest sister, the Lady Selina, who married Lord Holles of the Vine, a peer, who, in consequence of his wife's wealth, was raised to an earldom as Lord Osmington. The present lord, who is in that library, is grandson of the Lady Selina, who only survived her brother Archibald a twelve-month."

"Then the place does rightfully belong to him."

"Wait. My mother used to tell of how once a man came here, poorly clad, with hair prematurely white, complaining that he was destitute—a servant out of place, I think—declaring that he was the very lad who was supposed to have perished of the small-pox. My grandaunt Pentecost flew at him like a fury, mother said, and terrified him so that he ran away and never appeared again."

“*Quel conte de fée !*” ejaculated the foreigner.

“Madam Smalley, who’s close on eighty now, always was a tartar; so that part of it’s only natural; but it is curious that she could never be got to mention the subject afterwards.”

“Had the tartar been long connected with the family?” inquired Ambrosia.

“All her life. As a girl, she was the Lady Selina’s maid; and when the Lady Selina’s son—the second Lord Osmington, that is—married the Lady Olivia Staples, she was promoted to the post of housekeeper, which she has held ever since. This Lady Olivia died in child-bed of the present lord, but during her brief married life was oppressed by a conviction that things were far from right. She used to say that proofs of extinction were carelessly accepted by those in office, because, if there was one, the Irish family was low and mean, while the Lady Selina was worthy of the fortune. Moreover, her politics were in favour of the existing Government, and her influence in the county great. She was satisfied, and asked no questions; but with Olivia, second Lady Osmington, ’twas different. She groped about herself as well as she could, poor thing, and had a chest full of family documents; and when on her death-bed besought her husband to do something—none knew what but himself and grand-aunt Pentecost. Neither of them did anything, and things went on as before, and the present lord

inherited when the time came, without anybody troubling."

"What rubbish!" yawned Madam Ambrosia, drawing a cloak about her shoulders. "Your marvel hinges on a servant out of place, packed off, no doubt, for stealing spoons, who told a lie, and didn't dare to stick to it."

"Tais-toi!" cried the foreigner, sharply. "You are a fool! Go on, girl. I am amused. Is there any more?"

"Yes, ma'am; the oddest part of all. Four years ago my lord was here, just as he is now, with a guest or two from London, and they had been drinking port, and had gone to bed at dawn, after the mode of London gentlemen."

"Never mind London gentlemen; they are bad and wicked," put in the foreigner.

"Yes, ma'am. My lord was not gone to bed, but lay, gasping like a fish, in a great chair by the open window of the library, to cool his headache. Presently he looked up, for something was 'twixt him and the light. I was under the yew-hedge, and saw the meeting. It was a little boy, fair, with silky waves of gold, so pretty, in a funny dress, like a mountebank! Though his feet were bare and bleeding, and his clothes festooned and windowed, so ragged as to hang about his body, he stood up as proud as you please before my lord, and held out a paper.

“ ‘You dirty little vagabond!’ roared out my lord, with an evil glare. ‘How did you get into the grounds, and what do you want?’

“ ‘Mammy’s marriage lines,’ the boy replied, still holding out the paper.

“ ‘And who may mammy be?’

“ ‘A corpse, alas!’ answered the little boy, with streaming eyes. ‘I left my mammy in a barn ever so far off, for she told me to make haste to you; and here I am, and here’s the paper that she bade me give!’

“ ‘A filthy tramp!’ my lord shouted. ‘Begone, you nameless wretch!’

“ ‘I am not nameless,’ announced the child, proudly. ‘I am Lord Northallerton.’

“ ‘You’re what?’ my lord shrieked, as he took the paper in his unsteady hand and stared at it. At first he scowled; but after a while lay back, and yelled till he was purple in the face. I trembled under the hedge; but the boy was unabashed.

“ ‘A certificate of marriage,’ I heard his lordship read derisively, ‘between Hans Jarvis, soldier, and Naomi Snell. She followed the drum, I suppose, your precious mammy, carrying you in her tattered hood?’

“ ‘Mammy said that I am Leoline, Earl of Northallerton, and she never told a lie.’

“ My lord grew serious, and his brow darkened

ominously; for Leoline is an uncommon name, though it occurs often in the Jervois pedigree. He sat a long time twisting the paper in his fingers, and then, making up his mind, rang the bell, and ordered his valet to take the new-comer to the servants' hall."

"Bravo! Then he took the stranger in? One of the seven works of mercy!"

"Like a stepmother, ma'am! He gave him coarse clothes and food, and 'prenticed him to a carpenter in yonder town of Ripon, where the minster is."

"To keep him under his thumb," mused Ambrosia. "Not ill devised."

"But Leoline wouldn't bear it, ladies!" continued the narrator, hotly. "The carpenter gave him tools, and explained the use of each; and when he had done, his 'prentice took them quietly to the common, and calling together the boys of his age, made them a fine speech, declaring himself the rightful heir to all he saw. 'Was a Jervois,' he asked, with the dignity that goes with a new suit of broadcloth, 'who could boast of descent from Anne Plantagenet, granddaughter of Edward III., to be bound slave to a coffin-maker?' Where he picked up the jargon, I know not, but 'twas effective. The boys, ripe for mischief, huzzaed; and the obnoxious tools were committed to the flames with solemn rites. Of course he got a drubbing, and my lord set himself to crush his haughty spirit. Taking him from the carpenter, he bound him

to Kimpton, our village blacksmith, who's terribly severe; and every one cried shame, for he's a poet born, too tender for so rough a trade."

Abigel's face glowed as she wound up her narrative of wrong, and Ambrosia remarked sneeringly—

"This precocious slip of fifteen is vastly interested in the scapegrace!"

"And so am I," cried the stout painted lady, jumping up. "I'd like to befriend the child, if only to spite that odious Lord Osmington. Come, and we will talk with him; for it must be that same boy with golden curls who took my fancy at the forge where our carriage is a-mending. Aha! milord. You feared le petit vagabond might be a trouble, so you put him in a bottle and corked it down! And you are a friend of my bad, base husband. We will be even. Allons!"

Delighted with some plan that was working within her brain, the ungainly foreigner waddled on so fast in her slipshod shoes, that the others had much ado not to be left behind. The park gates were off their hinges. There was no one to ask the wanderers their business. Passing through the humble street of Stratton-on-the-Fosse, the party reached the forge, outside which there stood a dusty travelling chariot. Something was amiss with one of the wheels. The stalwart blacksmith and his interesting apprentice were hammering away, while a second boy, of quite

another type, leaned listlessly against the wall, whistling.

"For shame, Cyrus!" exclaimed the maiden. "You idle, brawny, ne'er-do-well! Why can't you give a helping hand, being thrice as strong as poor Leo?"

"I ain't Kimpton's 'prentice, and I hate Leo," was the sulky reply of Cyrus Smalley.

"No, you don't; no, you don't; you're jealous!" retorted the gleeful girl. "Please, ma'am, that's a good-for-nothing lout. This is the boy whose history I have related."

"You have?" inquired the smith, rising from his task in wrath. "Your long tongue, Miss Abby, will get you into trouble some day. How many times have you been warned to mind your business?"

"This is my business," was the pert retort. "It's a crying shame, and Leo has no friend but me, who am also friendless."

The boy, for whose behoof Miss Rowe was so eloquent and ready to do battle, gave her a grateful smile, and glanced shyly at the new-comers.

"Joli bébé," murmured the stout one. "What did you do, mon enfant, with de certificate—de marriage lines?"

"My lord hath it still," rejoined Leoline, his blue eyes staring with astonishment in that a stranger should be interested in his case.

"And your mammy gave you nothing else?"

"Oh yes!" interrupted the maid, who was always, apparently, at high pressure. "A seal, bearing the family arms. Leo, show your seal to the kind ladies."

"No papers?"

"No, madam," replied the lad. "But her dying words never leave my memory. 'Leoline,' she said, holding my fingers tight, for she was too near the better world to see aught any more in this, 'preserve the relic always, and the sense of who you are will keep you straight through life. A proper pride has naught akin to vanity. Before God you are the earl, though before man you'll never be, for you have no money and no proofs, and no means of getting either.' And then she lay back and died."

"Étrange! n'est-ce-pas, Ambrosia," murmured the foreigner, sinking into reverie. Then, tapping the boy on the shoulder, she said, "What do you think of me?"

"Of you, madam?" stammered the blushing lad, as he gazed at the raddled cheeks and blackened eyebrows.

"I am fat and awkward and ugly. I know that; my sweet husband has told me so often enough. What I mean is, would you like to live with an ugly, awkward, unhappy woman like me, rather than hammer iron?"

"Oh, ma'am, how good and kind—an angel!" cried

the maid, entranced in that her humble arrow should have hit its mark.

"Tut, tut! Here's a coil," growled the blacksmith, testily. "Do you think, furrin or not, that you can walk off like that with a British 'prentice? He's no free agent, let me tell you. Your chaise is ship-shape now, and the sooner you go off in it the better. Live with you, forsooth! Drat these furriners!"

"But I'll adopt your apprentice," insisted the stout lady; while the thin one, in a voluble torrent of French, implored her to be cautious.

"I won't be cautious," snapped the former, in the same tongue. "I never was cautious, and I hate it. There is a mystery here which concerns Lord Osmington, and as he's the chosen ally of my devil of a husband, it will be a pleasure to work him ill. The boy's a nice boy, too, and I mean to have him, and therefore you'll be good enough to be silent."

So spake the stout lady, and turned again with imperious mien towards the blacksmith.

"You've a slave, and want a price. That is fair. I want your slave. What is his price?"

"Did a human mortal ever!" ejaculated the bewildered artisan, scratching his grizzled poll. "Excuse me, but I don't know you, and don't want to. And here you come dropping from the clouds in a broken shay to whisk off my 'prentice. Is there anything else you'd like to take? There are some

lovely bantams in the backyard. It's moon-looniness, and nothing else. Besides, what would my lord say?"

"He is so interested, then, and you are afraid? He bids you keep close your prisoner. No? Then 'tis a matter of gold. How much?"

"How these furriners do go on!" marvelled the honest smith. "Gold? S'pose you are very wealthy? A widder, maybe, from the Injies? Anything to do with Bony?"

"I draw fifty thousand pounds a year from your public treasury," announced the lady, with a stately air; "and you may gain by bending to my whim. I am the Princess of Wales."

The artisan stared, and caught a glimpse of jewels flashing in the firelight. "Whew!" he whistled; and slowly doffing his cap, looked at the thin companion with suspicion. "Can that be?" he asked.

"Quite true," she said; "and I am Madam Ambrosia Cotton, lady-in-waiting on her Royal Highness. She has been taking a tour through your charming country, and we are on our way to town."

"God bless you, ma'am," murmured the rough fellow, with a trembling voice. "We heard you were somewhere in the North. The country's sorry for you, and the insults you endure; but you'll have your own, ma'am, never fear, or there isn't justice on the globe. Afraid of my lord? Not I. You can take

the boy and welcome, and he too highly honoured. A good lad, if dreamy and too fond of butterflies and flowers, and such trash, and scrawling foolish rhymes upon clean paper. I'd be loth to stand in his light, and will have his indentures cancelled if you say the word. My lord can't hurt me, and Leoline will never make a tester in the smithy. A fig for his anger, if I can give you a pleasure. Where do you sleep to-night?"

"At Ripon," answered the Princess. "Come, Leoline. So you write boedry? You shall be my boet and little Charlotte's page, who wants a play-fellow. Get your hat and come."

While the lad moved off, half-dazed at this sudden freak of fortune, the smith assisted the ladies to mount, and peering in at the window with profound secrecy, whispered—

"Beg pardon, ma'am, but do you know who's at Battle Magna?"

"Your mauvais sujet of a lord."

"Yes; from Doncaster for a night or two, and with him Lord Alvanley and—the Prince of Wales!"

"The Prince! Pas possible. What need have I to care? Tant mieux. I will stop at Ripon to-morrow in hope of meeting him, for he loves not to meet me. Arrange this matter of the boy, and I will send money, what you want, from London. Allons! Be quick, Leoline. Now, fouette cocher!"

and love.

And under the glittering stars
The Princess wrapped her new
And overcame, as a strange and
in vain.

CHAPTER II.


A SURPRISE.

“Of all the queer starts that’s the queerest. Was I right or wrong?” reflected the blacksmith, as, wagging his head with portentous solemnity, he replaced his woollen cap and retired within his cottage. “No. It’s killing a brace of birds—doing a good turn to the boy and pleasing the injured Princess; that can’t be wrong.”

Abigel and her cousin Cyrus were left standing in the road; the maiden with a flush of triumph on her face, which she was at no pains to conceal, while her big companion stood straddle-legged, his large paws plunged deep in breeches pockets and his tongue in his cheek, frowning down at her.

“You’ve done it,” he grunted. “Won’t my lord be in a fume!”

“Dear Leo!” murmured the girl. “He’ll be a London gentleman, and ride in a coach and six some day, perhaps, and all through little me! A lion and a mouse. Oh, Cy dear, I am so happy!”



"You'll be less happy when my lord knows of it," reflected her cousin; and as he thought of the royal lady's eccentric whim, the frown gave place to a broad grin of satisfaction, which was better suited to his style of countenance.

"Who'll tell my lord?" he inquired of the landscape. "Some one must. My word! Won't he play havoc with the furniture!"

"Tell him? I will," returned the damsel, promptly. "Do you suppose I am afraid of Lord Osmington?"

"No, little Abby; I don't think you ever were afraid, not even of grandam Pentecost. 'Twill come best from you, for you are every one's pet."

"Come along, then. If a thing's to be done, no time like the present." And hand in hand the boy and girl sped along the neglected avenue, with the nimble fleetness of game chased by the hunter.

Miss Abigel Rowe, self-constituted paladin of the oppressed, was, as she told the Princess, fifteen years old, one year the junior of her cousin, whom she held in silken fetters. Indeed, despite her youth, the virile energy of her mind exerted over the bovine persons among whom it was her lot to dwell a stronger influence than they themselves suspected. It was the fashion to let Miss Abby have her way, and even Lord Osmington, when he came northward, elected to humour the favourite.

Grandaunt Pentecost stood alone in resistance to

her wiles ; but, then, Madam Smalley was so different from other folk. She was supposed to be the repository of important secrets connected with the families of Northallerton and Osmington. No one knew it as a fact, for, despite her sex, she studiously avoided gossip—had actually managed to vegetate in the old house through a long life without making a single friend of her own rank. The Lady Selina who inherited her unlucky brother's fortune was always the kind patroness of Pentecost ; so was Olivia, mother of the present lord—in a different way ; for she was weak and nervous, only too glad to resign the cares of a large household into the hands of a tried dependent.

On the demise of the chatelaine she took the master in hand as well as the domestics. Nothing could be done without the approbation of the house-keeper, and when he in turn descended into the vault, his son looked on the old servant in the light of a second mother. And well he might, for she had nursed him with extreme devotion. Vere, present lord, had seen at the opening of this chronicle some forty summers, but he had lived so fast and become so finished a *roué* that he was a hundred at least in mundane experience, and no little fouled by contact with its slime. He was one of that wild circle whom the Heir-Apparent counted as his friends at the outset of his career, vying in rowdy reckless-

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to pay for a harlot's
rent-roll, he was always
live without the Jews.
Battle Magna fell into ruin.
tolerable order by a few
few one by one from the roof
worked their will upon
took no notice ; for if the
the mansion crumble, why
Moreover, there was a cause
negligence. Always taciturn,
over Pentecost after the visit
whom she had sent violently
endless, haunted by carking
as of neglect on the part of her
to drink, locked herself with a

bottle in her chamber, refusing to open if any one knocked, mumbling to herself with monotonous plaint of how sorely she was afflicted. It became a standard jest at Stratton-on-the-Fosse, that drink was no comfort to Madam Smalley, for the more maudlin she grew the more was she afflicted, the more she sighed and whimpered. But she showed no signs of blabbing. Far from it. Nor Cyrus nor Abigel could learn anything of the past. Indiscreet questions were parried by a curt rejoinder, and were usually followed, in the girl's case at least, by a box on the ears or a smart slap upon the cheek.

And so the years flew on rapidly, by reason of their eventlessness. Cy became a hulking youth of sixteen, who shrank from his book, and whose muscles were the terror of the neighbourhood; while Abigel grew up to medium height, and assumed the graces of a woman. At fifteen, she was forward for her age, not to say precocious; tormented by vague aspirations of quixotic loftiness and impracticability, impulsive, domineering, blunt and downright; uncompromising in her dislikes, but trusty and true to those who possessed a place in her affections. In outward appearance she was comely enough; of gipsy type, with a face of a regular oval, olive cheeks, dark flashing eyes, short black hair straying in wanton curls all over a shapely head. Around her ripe red lips were dimples of careless glee, which gave place at times to furrows of deep

wrath—when provoked, for instance, by cousin Cy, on which numerous occasions her neat figure swelled and palpitated, while she stamped her tiny feet and doubled her little fists. Cy, of course, professed to be over head and ears in love with his engaging cousin, after the blundering manner of hobbledehoyhood, and displayed his affection, as boys will, by a system of teasing; but having succeeded in rousing the devil in her eyes, he was always delighted to prostrate his strength before her, and metaphorically to allow himself to be jumped upon. With his big bones, large joints, and good-natured roughness, he resembled a Newfoundland puppy; a faithful, cumbrous, frolicking thing, with which it is amusing to play sometimes, but whose gambols are apt to be aggravating. Master Smalley was not much oppressed by his intellect; at any rate, his brains were uncultured. His intelligence seemed to lie in his hands rather than his pate, and the honest, simple soul within was racked with anguished jealousy when by slow degrees it broke on him that his quick-witted, irascible Abby preferred another playfellow to his hulking self. Perchance she exaggerated an affection for Leoline as a return for her cousin's teasing; perhaps she was swayed by the unconscious spirit of coquetry which buds with womanhood. Be that as it may, it dawned on him that Abigel was unduly fond of tripping down to the forge to discourse with the golden-haired 'prentice. The mystery that

shrouded his origin had charms for her romantic nature, while the glimpses which he appeared to have into a higher sphere filled her with awe and admiration. And then he needed comforting, for he was never out of trouble. If the day was fine, he would play truant, retire with a crust into the recesses of a wood, and lie gazing motionless for hours at the interlacing boughs and shimmering leaves, dreaming—who shall say of what? Then, on his return, Mr. Kimpton would doff his waist-strap and belabour him vigorously withal, till his white flesh quivered, and his lips turned blue, and he bit them till they bled to smother a rising cry. But correction was of no avail. The sun seemed to work a spell which he was powerless to disobey, and Abigel wondered at his proud defiance of the strap, and the toughness of his powers of endurance. It was more fascinating to watch this paradox than to play with the Newfoundland puppy. Leoline, thoughtful and contemplative, took to Abigel as she to him, taught her to prefer books to birds' nests, encouraged the love of light and flowers and cloud-wreaths, which were innate in her gipsy nature. The two became inseparable companions, talked of things that were beyond the ken of Cyrus, until the latter was consumed with impotent frenzy, and vowed that he could not comprehend what she saw in the sawny creature. That we should show ingenuity in making ourselves miserable is a natural law. Cyrus

took to hanging about the forge and making grimaces at the apprentice, counting the number of Abigel's visits thither, and breathing fire and brimstone. Hence he was on his rack as usual when the girl approached with the ladies, and when the carriage rolled away a gleam of pleasure shone in upon his heart. The odious Leoline was gone, while Abigel remained behind.

It was true that Lord Osmington was entertaining his royal master. The Prince of Wales, Lord Alvanley, and Mr. Brinsley Sheridan were his guests for a night, the first having remarked at Doncaster that he wished to see the celebrated gardens, with an eye to reproducing them himself; and the party had just risen from their wine and were strolling on the terrace when the cousins appeared upon the scene.

With the outward form of Queen Charlotte's eldest son at the age of forty-five, the world is sufficiently familiar. His enemies—and they were many—were wont to describe him as a florid, flashy, idle sybarite, with nothing good about him save his clothes; and his enemies were guilty of malicious falsehood, as enemies often are. He was unpopular with the great lords of the more serious sort, because he chose his friends for their marked peculiarities of character, heedless of whence they sprang. His petty royal pride was such that it was less irksome for him to joke with his tailor than with the most illustrious of

the *noblesse*; he could be more easily familiar with a mushroom like Brummel, than admit into his everyday confidence a Norfolk or a Somerset. An unbiassed contemporary described him well, when he said that George, Prince of Wales, was an amiable Oriental potentate, who had been dropped upon distracted Europe at a period of upheaval and transition. The times in which he lived were fraught with peril and anxiety, for new ideas suggestive of escape from swaddling-clothes had been wafted across seas from America—theories which had already transformed France into a shambles, and were germinating in our own land into a fermenting crop of bitterness. Throbs of a new democratic pulse were manifest in commercial circles. People dared to think for themselves, and, unused to the process, rushed into extremes. The idol of respect for things that are was overthrown, and the worshippers knelt before gods of unfamiliar mien, who might turn out beneficial or develop into an abiding curse. Tongues unaccustomed to freedom wagged beyond decent measure. The period, indeed, may be dubbed the age of personal invective and lawless licence of attack. Parliament set the example, for within its walls a permissible sharpness of controversy gave way to unbridled virulence. The fine edges of feeling were blunted, and the general acrimony, which was the direct result, produced a coarseness of thought, and hence of manners. The

“ Spirit of the age ” is a fair sample of the journalism of the day, remarkable as it is for poverty of humour, vulgar witlessness, and unblushing scurrility. If private individuals were made to suffer through an unchecked appetite for scandal, how much more did the Prince of Wales, who was the acting head of aristocratic society, and unfortunate in his domestic relations ! He was allowed to possess no virtues, and yet it is an acknowledged fact that all who were brought into close contact with him—men of probity and worth, such as Sir William Knighton—were devoted to his Royal Highness. His faults were the outcome, in great measure, of defective education. In early life he was severely repressed and snubbed, and, from want of a fitting channel for his energies, grew selfish and indifferent to affairs. He had a peculiar horror of death—quite European—and of squalid misery, and a Mogul’s appreciation of sumptuous and expensive show. His graver failings were due rather to bad example and an indulgence of passions imperfectly controlled, than to innate viciousness. That he was singularly unfortunate in his early cronies must be conceded. When quite a boy he was thrown into contact with *Égalité* Orleans, than whom a more vile preceptor never existed, uniting as he did in his own person the worst attributes of tiger, ape, and fox. These cronies stuck to him like burrs till one by one they dropped, and when they did they were replaced

by better ones ; but by that time the Regent's character was moulded beyond power of radical change, and the first impress could never be quite effaced. But few even of his rowdy boon companions were entirely bad. We will examine three of them now.

Lord Alvanley, a dandy in the Coldstreams, was of middle height, well and strongly built, but corpulent, with a short nose, like a knob between two moons. Rich, chivalrous, witty, honourable in his way, his *laissez aller* in the details of life must seem to a later generation quite incredible. When at one time he got desperately involved, and Charles Grenville offered his assistance, he sent in a schedule whereby his debts appeared less hopeless than at first ; but the following morning it was followed by a pencilled note, stating, with characteristic airiness, that a single item of fifty thousand pounds had unaccountably been overlooked. At a country house, where he was known, a servant was always set apart to watch him ; for he persisted in reading in bed, and in extinguishing his candle either by flinging it on the floor and taking shots with a pillow, or by placing it, still lighted, under the bolster. His manner was effeminate ; but, like Lord Osmington, he had once been a soldier, and had distinguished himself on several occasions so splendidly at the head of his regiment, that he took advantage of the circumstance to decline for the future to be drawn into duels. He was a good speaker, ready in debate ;

a first-rate sportsman ; as a companion, bubbling with spirits ; while as for his dinners, they were celebrated, and the guest deemed himself lucky who was bidden. This was not so very reprehensible a crony.

Mr. Brinsley Sheridan was quite another person. He glittered, like a harlequin's coat, with dazzling points. He also was muscular, and of middle size ; but at this stage of his existence, though stamped with the brand of genius, was showing signs of decadence, like a good shirt frayed. His once handsome features were bloated with excess ; his pimpled nose a fiery red ; his costume slovenly ; his appearance premonitory of prospective squalor, such as his master abhorred. Yet George clung loyally to him, for his devotion of five and twenty years had been sincere and disinterested, if servile and self-debasing. But his moral standard was being lowered daily, by reason of a succession of humiliations and difficulties with which he was unfit to cope. Entangled and harassed, he was constantly put to the most degrading shifts, till, little by little, he undermined that reputation for public integrity in Parliament, which palliated for awhile the vices of his private life. Sheridan was so conscious of the possession of a blarneying tongue, that he amused himself by indulging his power of wheedling people, merely for the fun of showing off, and when it was quite unnecessary. Instances are extant of his overreaching clamorous tradesmen for the jok —

of it, and paying them honourably on the morrow. It was an unfortunate gift, for what at first he did in jest he came to do afterwards in earnest, and the result was a reckless Hibernian harum-scarumness in pecuniary matters, which brought its inevitable reward. He cared nothing for money for its own sake, and never learnt to husband it; for, like many another genius, he could sow and reap better than other people, but never could learn to garner. The brilliant talents of the orator and dramatist fascinated George as they did others, but all admitted that the jewel, many-sided as it was, had a flaw in every facet. At one time he aspired to be a political leader, and although in him were united a vivid and inventive fancy, a rich variety of language, an inexhaustible fund of wit, yet was he lacking in industry and penetration, so unbusiness-like as to wither under routine. As manager of Drury Lane, he was, on the whole, as magnificently unsuccessful as in the Commons. Of his celebrated speech on the Begum question, Burke, who hated him, pronounced it excellent. We all know the admirable qualities of *The Rivals* and the *School for Scandal*, and yet the results of his reign over the patent theatre were deplorable. Never was there a more paradoxical individual than Brinsley. The upper part of his face, Lord Byron said, was that of a god; the lower, ~~that~~ of a satyr. His character was equally con-

tradictory. He had the reputation of never paying his debts. On the contrary, he was always paying; but in so indiscriminate a manner, and with so little justice to himself or others, as often to leave the respectable creditor to suffer for his patience, while the fraudulent dun received three times his debt. His improvidence was such that he would start on a journey without funds, and be kept cooling his heels in a village inn till remittances came to hand. But with all his indolence and slipslop ways, he could on occasion drudge like a very slave. Fitful marks of excessive labour are discoverable through the whole of his career. To such minutiae of effect could he attend in the House, that memoranda have been found of the precise place where the words, "Good God, Mr. Speaker!" would be introduced. So with plays and *bon mots*. The hard work which he underwent for the polishing of the *School for Scandal* is astonishing in one who made believe to be so ready; and this may account, perhaps, for the shortness of his list of comedies. Perchance he felt that all that was possible had been done, and knew better than to fight against himself. 'Twas hard to be called on to write a brace of *Schools for Scandal*. He was never a great talker. During the many hours that he remained in bed he was employed, while others gave him credit for sleeping, in laying the framework of the evening's liveliness,

and, like a skilful priest, prepared his miracle beforehand. Nothing was more remarkable than the patience and tact with which he would wait for hours in order to let fly the arrow at the right minute. The consequence of this practice of waiting was that he would remain inert while others gabbled, and suddenly came out with a lightning sally, such as threw a glow over a whole evening, to be carried away and treasured by admiring listeners. The result of his powers in this direction was, that Mr. Sheridan was eagerly sought by the most distinguished amphitryons, and gave way to dissipation. No money came into his pocket but what Drury Lane supplied. Dazed as he was with success as a playwright, and fickle by nature, he left the theatre to look after itself—never went near it except to draw upon the treasury—and the goose, unfed by its keeper, ceased to lay golden eggs. “Be careful,” friends said in warning. “I am too poor,” he gaily answered. “Penury gains nothing by husbanding its thrift;” and so he floundered on, too thoughtless to investigate the extent of his resources, till the time came when the treasury was empty. Write a play, his friends advised in chorus. But no; he could not, or he would not, and sank deeper in the mud and deeper. I vow I am not surprised that George, dazzled and enchanted, should have kept a tender place for Brinsley, bad adviser though he was, a sheep of murky hue.

Of the third crony who paced the terrace by the Prince's side, we already know a little. John Vere, third Lord Osmington, was not a genius. A *grand seigneur* of the strange type of his time, his delicate face was blanched by late hours and the inward fever of excitement and high play. So inveterate a gamester was he, that there dangled from his voluminous watch-chain, among a score of seals and locketts, a set of dice and a dice-box no larger than your little finger. He affected extravagant attire of a horsey order—a white surtout with a scarlet cape, tallyho buttons, and a low collar like a stableman's; and was followed, when on a public promenade, by at least a dozen dogs. Not that he cared to shoot or hunt, for rural joys were to him a nuisance. An affectation of doggishness was useful as a means for the display of a modish eccentricity. For example, when asked once to patronize a provincial theatre, he “commanded” the whole dress circle; arrived in pink with a pack of hounds, paid for them as a bevy of ladies, and made them sit up on the benches. His boyhood was passed with jockeys and grooms, of whom he would knowingly inquire if they were “slap up, demmy, to the mark.” Not long enough at school to be educated, rich enough to afford a contempt for learning, he arrived with his majority at the supreme perfection of being mistaken for his coachman. He could drive four-in-hand, or peel like an onion when his nerves were strong enoug

and ride his own matches at Newmarket; was posted in stable-lore; even had a tooth filed that he might spit with the precision of a hackney-driver. In town, at Osmington House, he was in his element: a constant flow of people rushed in and out, of all ranks and denominations and all disreputable shades.

To a man with a life so ordered, the intervals were hideous which stepped between his pleasures. Solitude was a bugbear to be exorcised by any means. After a breakfast of highly seasoned viands—broiled chicken, curried prawns, green tea—he would hold a *levée* in a broidered silken robe. One secretary, one quack doctor, four animal painters, a mob of fiddlers, writers, dancers, pugilists. Bores and duns were kept at arm's length. The singers and dancers, being of the soft sex, were admitted each to a private audience of fourteen minutes by the clock, and they generally managed to capture a ring or brooch or graceful nicknack before they would consent to vanish. Then, while interviewing the stable people, he would smoke three pipes, polish snuff-boxes, select a cane for the day, and after that submit himself to the barber, while some one read a journal or scraps from the racing calendar. Before sallying forth on the "Grand Strut," he was always careful so to arrange the evening as to prevent the apparition of the bugbear. Sometimes it was politic to be civil to an unpaid wine-merchant or untried

usurer. "Gomez! Read the roll," he would command. "Who dines? Ten covers only? Pooh! Twenty at least." And in searching the highways and hedges such odd company was sometimes bidden, that the butler was left to deplore a loss of plate now and again, a guest his pelisse of sables. In days gone by the bosom friend, as has been said, of Coleraine and Barrymore, he exceeded in luxury and Mohockism that pair of immortal rowdies. He it was who rode a favourite horse up Mrs. Fitzherbert's staircase on the Steine to the garret, from which unfamiliar altitude the beast was lowered with cables. He, too, it was who was carried about Brighton in a coffin, making such frightful faces at those who approached to view the corpse that one woman at least had fits. Such company as Hanger's and Osmington's was indeed bad for a young Prince just out of his teens, who was by them disgraced in the eyes of the observant lieges. A wise father would have gently weaned him from companions of high rank and no morals, who consorted with bruisers and harlots; but his Majesty, as we shall see, had by his own act abdicated a father's rights, and his son, once deceived by him, refused to hearken to his droning.

At sight of the distinguished group, the courage of bashful Cyrus oozed out of his finger-ends, and he allowed his intrepid cousin to advance alone, who stood panting like a modern Dian gazing at a stout

Endymion. To her the Prince of Wales was the ideal of the awfully wonderful, and her heart throbbed to look on him at last. There was such a naïve ardour of adoration in her attitude that the prince burst out laughing.

"What a pretty girl!" he said. "Is this a surprise, Vere? Bravo! Produce some more."

Lord Osmington turned, and his hard look softened, for Abigel's abrupt independence and simple fearlessness amused him, as a toy terrier might.

"A *protégée* of mine," he said dryly. "What do you want here, young woman?"

"A *protégée*! O-ho!" laughed George, while Sheridan and Alvanley smiled. "Then you make some use of this ghost-trap, after all? A nice secluded spot for a *Parc-aux-cerfs*. Sly boots!"

Vere seemed annoyed, but replied quietly, "A relation of my housekeeper's, whom I am having educated after a fashion to please that admirable dame."

"Bless me! To what end?" lisped fat Alvanley, raising his quizzing glass. "Vastly pretty, on my word; in an unusual style. My lady Albina Buckinghamshire would give ten thousand pounds for such natural roses; and such a spruce young figure! Quite an Euphrosyne!"

Abigel blushed crimson under the deliberate and impudent inspection to which she found herself sub-

jected. Although her idol was there in the flesh not five paces off, she wished herself safe in her chamber.

"A very sweet, engaging girl!" the Prince declared pleasantly.

"I hope Pepita doesn't know of her existence," Sheridan observed, with a nudge of his elbow. "'Twould be a pity for such eyes to be scratched out."

"You're too bad!" cried Vere, with a peevish shrug. "May I never be respectable?"

"For a change," suggested Alvanley, "just once."

"*A bonâ-fide protégée!*" repeated the Prince. "A tame lamb. Lambs grow into mutton; and what then?"

"Egad! I've never thought of it," Vere said.

"I suggest that you bring her to town," cried Sheridan. "There's quite a *distinguée* air under the rusticity. She'd make a Lady Teazle. Would you like to go to London, my dear?"

Abigel thought of Leoline, now on his way thither, and answered, "Yes."

"Yes?" echoed Lord Osmington. "What next? Upon my life, it isn't such a bad suggestion, though. She's well-looking enough, with a little polish, to do me credit; and there'd be the advantage that I need never be alone. Besides, 'twould be an excuse to banish Pepita and the others, who are outrageously quarrelsome and rapacious—perfectly unrepresentable."

"The gay Lord O. as chaperon to an adopted daughter would be deliciously fresh," cried Alvanley, "and the rage and consternation of the camp followers entrancing. Vere, if you love me, bring Euphrosyne. Sweep the garden clean, and plant the victorious snowdrop."

"Don't mind them, child," George said kindly, observing the maid's discomfiture. "They're insolent varlets, who should know better than to be rude to pretty girls. Really, Vere, you might do worse than have so neat a Phyllis to brew tea for you. Who knows but what you might end by becoming *rangé*? Wouldn't that be comical?"

"Grandaunt might object, and I would not offend her for the world," Lord Osmington replied. "What did you come for? You were bursting just now with something. So's Cyrus, with eyes like gooseberries."

The remarks of the company had turned the damsel's thoughts in another direction. To go to wondrous London, see the world, meet Leo under his new auspices, from whom she had so gladly parted, knowing the value of the change to him—it would be glorious. Some of those dim aspirations that haunted her virgin mind might become solid facts—the fairy babble chanted by the singing Fosse. But a repetition of the question brought her back to earth. She had to face my lord's ire for meddling

in what concerned her not. She suspected that, for some reason of his own, my lord wished Leo to live and die in obscurity, and through her act he was whirled out of reach, and none could tell what might come of it. Well, she felt she had done right, and grew brave with conscious merit.

"I came to announce," she said, in a voice which was not quite steady, "that Leoline has gone away."

"Gone—where? On a job with Kimpton, I suppose?"

"No. Kimpton has resigned him to a lady, who has driven off London-wards."

"By what right?" bawled my lord, out of himself, in a sudden burst of passion. "Without my consent! Dash, dash! What right had he to break the articles? I'll have the villain hunted from the village."

Lord Osmington was usually so cynically cool and self-possessed that his friends were astonished, and he curbed his petulance with an effort.

"What's this?" inquired his Royal Highness. "Who is Leoline?"

"Nobody, sir. A ragamuffin I protected, and who, of course, turns out ungrateful."

"Another *protégé*," lisped Alvanley. "I swear it rains them. My dear boy, I'd no notion you were so benevolent. A philanthropist in disguise!"

"I would not trouble myself about ungrateful —

people," George remarked with indifference, as he took snuff in his peerless manner.

"Don't be angry, please!" implored Abigel. "The lady who took him is a grand lady, and will make his fortune. It was the Princess of Wales herself."

'Twas now the turn of the Prince to be disturbed.

"Who? What?" he cried. "*She* in the North?"

"To-night, please your Highness, she sleeps at Ripon, and lingers there to-morrow."

"Vere," said the Prince, roused from digestive cud-chewing to animation, "order the horses to be ready at dawn. I would not come face to face with that pestilent female for a king's ransom."

The distinguished company retired precipitately to make their preparations for an early start, while the mind of Cyrus Smalley was plunged in deep despondency. He had overheard Lord Alvanley's suggestion that Abigel should proceed to town, and was torn by a chill fear that he would never see her more.

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECT.

THE consternation which put to flight a party of brave and high-born gentlemen, upon discovering the proximity of one female with untidy stockings, seems to demand instant explanation.

Abigel was too guileless and idyllic to comprehend that husbands and wives can quarrel beyond repair.

Years before the date of this present chronicle, George, heir-apparent to the British crown, received the sobriquet of Florizel. He was the handsomest youth of his day; the most accomplished, the most refined, the most charming; the very acme and beau ideal of all a prince should be. The fairies, who always attend the christening of princes, gave each her gift of blessing and flew away. But on these occasions there is sure to be some one forgotten, left out in the cold; and that one is certain to be the most cross and spiteful, given to dyspepsia and indigestion, unforgiving of slights. The offended fairy, being more mischievously inclined even than usual,

bestowed two presents upon George, calculated when combined to play ducks and drakes with all the rest. They were called Imprudence and Procrastination. Until the recipient reached man's estate, they did not take effect. The presents of fairies never do. In the ordinary course the beautiful Florizel grew up, passed through teething and measles, and all that, and was worshipped by the fair sex, as beautiful princes are; but, being deprived by those cruel cadeaux of requisite mental ballast, he was tossed like a helpless cork on the waters of temptation, beguiled into whirlpools and eddies by sycophants and flatterers. Gayest and most seductive of Fortune's favourites, he tasted, as a boy, of every pleasure, basked in the beams of the present, forgetting that every enjoyment in this mortal life has a dose of gall attached to it—that after every earthly feast mine host brings in the bill. Florizel, urged and encouraged so to do, scattered his wild oats broadcast, and a pretty crop they were. His natural mentors were his parents; but, dull, bigoted, shallow, narrow-minded, and severe, their unseasonable harshness could not but irritate a lad of spirit, who was accustomed to be spoiled and pampered. Instead of reclaiming the volatile but sweet-tempered youth by a judicious display of gentle reproof, they repressed and called him vulgar names. Of his own accord he made several efforts to occupy himself worthily, but was forthwith by a wakeful jealousy coerced. Within

him, in early manhood, there was a wealth of human force imprisoned. 'Tis a thing that defies constraint : if dammed in a fair channel 'twill worm an exit through the mud. Wise, dependable advisers Prince Florizel had none. There was not a single person of age and influence to speak quietly and seriously at the right moment, to point out that in the footsteps of the Present walks the Future, carrying a carpet-bag stuffed with responsibilities and cares ; and he went his unguided way, stung to obstinate resistance by the act of those very parents who should have led him by the hand.

On the 21st of December, 1785, at the age of twenty-three, he took unto himself a rib—espoused a beautiful and virtuous lady, who, unluckily enough, was on various counts grievously obnoxious to the elders. She was a subject ; she was six years older than her lord ; worst of all, she was a Papist, which last form of obnoxiousness was very awful indeed in the opinion of the bigoted sovereign—for the garment of the Scarlet Woman affected his Majesty, just as a rag of the same colour is known to exasperate a bull. Such an alliance was not to be endured. It was illegal, impossible. Holy Sacrament forsooth ! Fiddle-de-dee ! The creature was not married at all ; was no better than she should be. A wife ? Pooh ! The low, artful hussy was a mistress ; the too beautiful slut was a brazen, designing baggage, who ought to

be ashamed of herself. Such an attitude on the part of a papa and mamma who had never been aught but harsh, scarcely mended matters. The young gentleman clove to his wife, while the King and Queen were never tired of abusing her. The quarrel, waged on one side by blind intolerance, on the other by obstinate indignation, waxed so hot that all communication ceased between the parents and their offspring. Time went on. The fatal christening gifts began to operate, and deftly did their work. Thanks to the seductions of the turf, a fondness for dabbling in bricks and mortar, and bouts of whist with dissipated Charles James, poor Florizel woke up one morning to find himself tied and bound by pecuniary bonds to the verge of suffocation. He was importuned in the open street, dunned, dogged, maddened, and would have found his ignominious way to the spunging-house had he not been privileged. His spouse, proudest and most sensitive of women, cried her eyes out. The embarrassed position of both seemed equally hopeless and inextricable. Since the family fracas, there was no use in going to the King. She was a millstone round the neck of him she loved so well. What a strait for a high-minded lady! She would drown herself, make any sacrifice to relieve her harassed darling; for it was clear that, so long as her odious shadow stood 'twixt father and son, the former would do nothing for his child. Things came to such

a pass that existence was a burthen ; and, hemmed in, bullied, badgered, tortured, unhappy Florizel went down upon his stubborn knees, and grovelled in the dust before his sire. Hard and ungenerous always, the petty tyrant—who by a whimsical jest of Fate was dubbed “the Good,” because he kept no mistresses—took base advantage of the complication. He offered to free his son from the gyves that galled, if he would dishonour himself and break his oath to one who trusted him—if he would wrench asunder with his own hand that other chain, the precious garland of scarlet blossoms with which he had chosen to adorn his willing neck, and don another of his father’s weaving. ’Twas vain to implore mercy ; and, driven into a corner, the wretched Florizel gave at last his reluctant consent to a wicked action, laying the first stone thereby of an edifice of retribution, under which he was to be crushed till death. Mrs. Fitzherbert, as dignified a figure in the procession of history as her contemporary, the other discarded wife, who died at Malmaison, bowed her fair head to the decree, and retired from the scene. Her case and that of Josephine were curiously similar. Though separated in the flesh, both continued to occupy a sacred place in their husbands’ hearts—both enjoyed the sympathy of the best and noblest in their respective countries till the end.

Having forced his son to break his word, good King

George proceeded to violate his own. He did not relieve his victim, as he led him to suppose he would, from his weight of liabilities—allow the young man to make a fresh start with a clean slate. He was content to stipulate with Parliament for the annual laying aside of a fixed sum for a slow and gradual absorption of the debts, by which unsatisfactory arrangement their existence continued to worry and hamper the luckless debtor, to tie his hands and irritate his temper for years afterwards.

As for the second wife who was to step into the shoes of the Scarlet Woman, the household tyrant would allow his son no choice, although he was by this time thirty-three years old; but himself selected for him a bride who could not boast of one domestic, intellectual, or moral qualification for the place she was called upon to fill. No doubt the ghastly mistake was unintentional, one only of the many blunders due to his obtuse Majesty's well-meaning stupidity; but surely the King must be made to bear the blame of the disasters which followed, since, while choosing to be tyrannical, he did not take the pains to make necessary and prudent inquiries. Sheridan, the Prince's *alter ego*, foresaw what would happen, and protested loudly against the danger and inhumanity of the proceeding—in vain. Poor Florizel, pampered, sensitively fastidious with regard to exterior things, spoiled during two decades by all that was most lovely

and highbred, found himself united for life to a coarse hoyden, who had to be lectured by Ambassador Malmesbury as to the desirability of washing and of eschewing dirty underlinen. I vow that my lord's account of the transaction chills the blood. The lessons, unhappily unheeded, were awful, which he, a man, was obliged to give to his future queen; such lessons as an ordinary girl would learn by instinct. Her manners were of a piece with her exterior. She was boisterous, vulgar, fond of low company, indelicate in conversation. The miserable Prince, already prejudiced against the interloper, gazed at her in distressed astonishment—for she was worse than even fancy painted—and exclaimed in the first gush of horror, “Oh, Harris, why didn't you tell me?”

To which the ambassador replied, “I was sent to bring her here, not to make a choice.”

The hopeless wretchedness of his situation drove Florizel to seek strength in artificial excitement. He fortified himself with drink ere he could approach the altar with this thing of beauty, and shuddered as, holding the coarse paw, he swore to love and cherish.

A very little inquiry would have instructed the King as to the girlish tricks of the virgin Caroline. At Brunswick vigilant duennas watched her at Court balls, lest she should pass love-notes to young men. Once when prevented from attending a *fête* on which she

had set her mind, she revenged herself by so cleverly simulating the forms of an *accouchement* as to electrify her mother, who pronounced her mad. Such broad practical jokes might possibly have tickled Florizel if performed by Miss Doll Tearsheet, but the ultra-fastidious Prince was not likely to approve such merry conceits on the part of *cara sposa*. Of his Royal Highness it cannot be said, "*Il subit courageusement son bonheur*." Such happiness and bliss as his Majesty had provided soon became unbearable. A few months after the royal couple were made one flesh they became two again, and nourished for each other ever after a healthy and abiding hate.

Soon after the separation, Princess Caroline took up her abode at Montagu House, Blackheath, with her infant daughter Charlotte; and the King, stricken, maybe, with tardy remorse in that through his bungling he had wrecked two lives, vouchsafed his moral support to the lady. Meanwhile, the Prince groaned under his residue of debts, and, entangled and encumbered by them, was driven to add to the score, and divided his time between grumbling at his father's mean deceit and cursing the behaviour of his wife.

Now, it chanced that at Blackheath there resided a certain Sir John and Lady Douglas. Caroline—impulsive, ill-regulated person—was charmed with her ladyship, who, thinking that such a friendship might bring her loaves and fishes, vowed eternal love

for the Princess. They warbled together at the harpsichord, kissed and fondled one another, drank bottled ale out of the same glass, and, quarrelling after awhile, set to work, as women will, to rend each other's characters. Lady Douglas, perceiving the direction of the wind, set her sails accordingly. Nothing was to be gained by hugging the Princess, while something might be won by betraying her peccadilloes to the Prince. So she began by ridiculing her quondam friend, and professing disgust at her huge appetite and partiality for fried onions. Caroline retorted with slander. She was always fond of gossip, and not particular as to its quality. Although devoid of tact, she saw too late how dangerous a foe she had conjured up by quarrelling with her astute neighbour, and made elephantine advances towards reconciliation, which Lady Douglas repulsed with scorn. Caroline, furious, wrote anonymous libels to Sir John, whose wife retaliated by inditing a list of her dear friend's escapades, and offering herself as a tool to Florize for the untying of the fatal knot. Sir John, as it happened, was attached to the household of the Duke of Sussex, and bore the list to him. The Princess called for help on the Duke of Kent, who was on unfriendly terms with her husband; and so it came to pass that all the royal brothers were drawn into the squabble and swam in the unsavoury broth.

Untie the knot! Such a prospect was too pleasant

to be realized, but it was worth a struggle. The Prince of Wales demanded an inquiry as to the conduct of his wife, which the King under the circumstances could not refuse. A Delicate Investigation was held accordingly by four noble lords with closed doors, through which strange rumours filtered into the ears of an astonished public. My lords Erskine, Grenville, Spencer, and Ellenborough met at Lord Grenville's house, and found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. They learned more than enough to satisfy their own minds, as extant letters show, but there was a powerful reason against the delivery of a decided verdict. Anne Bullen and Katherine Howard lost their heads for the crime with which Caroline was charged, but times were changed since then, and it would be vastly impolitic to threaten the wife of Florizel with a scaffold on Tower Hill. The unruly spirit from across seas was abroad and ripe for mischief. It would be extremely perilous, therefore, to convict of adultery a Princess of Wales. The Prince cried for a divorce, but was told that it could not be, for questions of precedent would have to be considered which must not be raked out of seclusion. The evidence was deemed insufficient to establish high treason, but was in itself so damnatory that wise men on both sides were equally anxious to suppress a report of the proceedings. No one was satisfied by so weak and abortive a conclusion. The Princess

remarked that as the commissioners had not declared her guilty, therefore she must be innocent, and, secure as she supposed herself to be in consequence of the dilemma, went so far as to threaten to publish a version on her own account merely to spite her enemies. In this dangerous resolve she was abetted by sundry rising politicians, who saw in the flinging of dirt at the throne a ladder wherewith to reach notoriety and fortune. Growing each day more hardened and reckless by reason of a false position and its irritating concomitants, the Princess took bitter delight in shocking people, and became the unconscious cat's-paw of a party, a handy weapon for the belabouring of political rivals. To Whitbread and Percival, and afterwards to Brougham, she was an invaluable staff for the support of temporary weakness. The second of these—Lord Egmont's second son—was filled for a space with indignation on her behalf, but circumstances changing, his ardour cooled amazingly.

If the wife was displeased with the result of inquiry, how much more so was the husband? The commissioners, shrinking from duty, had stultified themselves by a foolish compromise. "Undue levity" was their verdict, which might imply nothing or so much. The position was left in *statu quo*; but by their pusillanimous bit of cowardice a dagger was placed within reach of the enemy, which so uncontrite a sinner would be sure some day to use without com-

punction. Hers was no vain threat. She was quite capable, if goaded, of publishing a garbled account of that inquiry, and could tell any number of lies, since the other side dared not *ripost* with the real report, for state reasons. The butchers of souls, she declared, were afraid to attack her openly. Their object was to blast a woman's reputation by a sidewind, and to that end she had been haled before an illegal tribunal huddled in the dark, instead of being openly impeached before the House of Lords. Her housemaids and body-footmen had been suborned to act as mendacious spies. It was a trumped-up conspiracy, and she a martyr. Was the Prince of Wales likely to be gratified by such defiance—pleased with so lame a *dénouement*? Hardly. He raved at the folly of the four effete lords with their verdict of “Undue levity.” Disappointed, he vowed that he would register their names and loathe them for evermore. Discomfited in the main, he scored one admirable point, however. Caroline demanded a public reception at Court that the world might be assured of her innocence; and son and mother, fighting side by side for once, shrieked protests in unison against the scandal. Among other silly things Caroline had written home to Brunswick a satirical and spicy account of the Queen's failings, and that letter had fallen by accident or malice into the hands of Charlotte. Her Majesty was a good hater, and showed it now. She warmly espoused the

cause of her eldest-born against his erring wife, announced that his feelings must be considered—the first time she had thought so—and swore that a princess convicted of undue levity must be excluded from sacred Windsor. The verdict of the lords was so timidly expressed that the accused had no appeal, and yet her fair name was left with an intangible but enduring blot. Caroline summoned the King to her side in reams of vindictive rhapsody, but he, regretful and ashamed, kept silence. No wonder that, groping and purblind, hunted by the Nemesis of his own blunders, the monarch should have become subject to fits of mental aberration. Over this affair mother and son agreed to bury the hatchet and smoke for the future the calumet of peace; and, despite argument and protest, the Princess of Wales was banished from Court for an indefinite period, which might spread over a lifetime.

Whilst pitying the husband, one cannot help being sorry for the wife. Both deserve our sympathy. Under fair auspices, with all her faults, she might have sailed on smooth waters and have reached haven—a clumsy but useful bark. A good partner she would have made, for instance, for an obtuse, strong-stomached tiller of the soil, a boozing, beer-bibbing Westphalian baron, or coarse Russian magnate; somebody who was not squeamish, who could wield a stick or knout, and make himself obeyed with blows.

But Florizel was the one man of all others for whom she should not have been selected. In spite of hints and sage advice, each feeble effort to be ladylike broke down. A dismal failure. She found full soon that she had married nothing but a phantom—a bowing acquaintance with the crown of England, which the royal family had speedy cause to disavow. How ridiculous of a husband to dislike his wife because she objected to soap and water! Smarting under a legitimate sense of wrong, a boorish woman, who showed so singular a capacity for injuring herself, was little calculated to accept face-slaps with Christian fortitude. On the contrary, she would doubtless, in the immediate future, toss her cap over the windmill, as our Gallic neighbours have it; plunge with a smirched following, like another Comus-crew, into viler and fouler orgies. Who dared to prophesy what might be the end of it? All sorts of unexpected things are hidden in the womb of Time. Meanwhile it was not pleasant for the Prince of Wales to come on the repulsive offender without warning. Her tongue was long and indecorous, her manners lamentably rude. Are you surprised at the dismay of the group at Battle Magna when they became conscious of the close proximity of the woman with untidy stockings? I am not, for I think it was only natural.

CHAPTER IV.

CARLTON HOUSE.

THE ancestral dwelling which we surveyed just now in Yorkshire, though venerable and picturesque, was sadly out of repair. How delightful, then, is the privilege of the veracious chronicler who, with a turn of the wand and a shout of "Hey, presto! pass!" can transport his ravished readers without any trouble into an elysium of dazzling luxury! Behold, ladies and gentlemen, a stately entrance hall in the most fashionable quarter of the metropolis, embellished with lofty Ionic columns of sham Sienna marble; in front of each a magnificent bust of sham bronze by Mr. Nollekins on a pedestal of scagliola. From a heavily stuccoed ceiling, wrought in the classic manner, depend six enormous lanterns in the Pagoda style, wreathed with gaping serpents. Along three sides there are rows of "Empire" benches, covered with amber damask, on which are lolling a regiment of drowsy myrmidons in rich liveries. Passing these glorious athletes, you enter an ante-room choked with

chairs, sofas, settees, whose florid gilding is heightened by scarlet cushions. Very beautiful. The walls are panelled in scarlet cloth, brodered with amber sprigs, the brilliancy of which *ensemble*, we will admit, doth not set off to advantage the fine Dutch paintings which hang thereon. In one corner, wedged in behind a vast table of porphyry, is a pursy little gentleman in a close flaxen wig, kerseymere breeches, and a pale-blue coat, whose homely aspect harmonizes by trenchant contrast with the superior taste of the background. This is Mr. Townshend, the famous Bow Street officer, whose business it is to hover about the Prince of Wales, in whose service he has been for years. In his bluff way he is a wag, but at this moment he gnaws a pen gloomily; for a churchwarden and a sanded floor are more in his way than gauds; and a clinking of glasses, which may never touch his lips, reaches his sharp ears through closed portals. Poor tantalized Peri at the Gate! Out of this vestibule there are three exits: the one through which we entered; a second which gives on the golden saloon—a temple so thickly plastered with gilt gewgaws, rainbow draperies, pagodas, Chinese jars, screens, hideous modish nicknacks, that the abashed intruder feels an urgent craving for blue spectacles; and a third which leads into the great Gothic dining-parlour—an apartment whose upper end opens into a conservatory, appropriately modelled in miniature

semblance of a cathedral, with a marble Venus in the nave. This dining-parlour is truly elegant—fit shrine for an apotheosis of Bon Gout—and is much admired by the *élite*; for is it not divided into compartments by Gothic arches of new and original design, and are not the crimson satin hangings blushing like peonies, while the lamps and fire ornaments recall the characteristics of the East? Glancing about, one has much ado to remember in what quarter of the globe one is, being reminded now of a sacred fane; now of a Turkish mosque or Syrian harem; and then all at once, perhaps, the eye falls on something that hints of Louis Quinze, or Sesostris, or the Parthenon. How much more engaging to the cultured mind is this *omnium gatherum* of specimens, culled from the uttermost parts of the earth, than a commonplace monotony of one country and one epoch, such as one sees in many mansions that are rather proud of themselves!

There are a few canvases hanging, by-the-by, in this dining-room which I forgot to mention—to wit, a pair of Van de Velde's *chefs-d'œuvre* and a priceless Rembrandt—but they are dirty, washy squares, like black holes in the wall, and shun the inquiring optic in the kaleidoscopic carnival of colour. What can one want, after all, with craning after pictures when Weltje's masterpieces smoke upon the board and the Lafitte is circulating freely? The

curtains are so lively of hue, by the way, and the carpet so vivid (made in one piece, and said to weigh a ton), that I also forgot to remind you that the hall is occupied, though the fluctuating current of chit-chat might have betrayed to your ears the fact.

There are four persons lounging at their ease about the table, two of whom you have already seen—Prince George and Lord Osmington. The third is a stout-built, stalwart gentleman, with a merry, roving eye, and scalp inclined to baldness, whose round and somewhat vacant visage proclaims him of Guelfic stock. It is Frederick, Bishop of Osnaburgh and Duke of York, Florizel's favourite brother. He is Commander-in-chief of his Majesty's forces, and many fine things besides. The fourth enchants the spectator with the vision of a back such as can appertain to one favoured man alone—a straight, square, un-wrinkled, unexceptionable back, as perfect in its way as the leg in its speckless silk stocking and the blonde curls so daintily arranged. Bless my heart! We must speak with bated breath of these same curls; for they have engrossed the concentrated intellects of three distinguished artists, one of whom has exhaled himself upon the occiput, while the other two have lavished their energies to exhaustion over the sides and front. And, as he turns, how transcendent a neckcloth! Spotless, creaseless, awful. The face is not so taking as the attire; for the nose, shapely once,

has been flattened by an accident, while the whiskers are too sandy, the complexion too florid, the twinkling grey eyes too small, the bumps of self-esteem too prominent. You need not to be told that the Adonis is George Brummel, whose features are crumpled with concern, as he wipes a snuffbox with a kerchief. He sports the Whig colours of an evening, his coat being periwinkle-blue with brass buttons, his waistcoat buff. The beau is not pleased, and vents his displeasure in snorts and brow-puckerings, like a froward infant. He is not pleased because, for the time being, he is not the centre of attention. Lord Osmington, who can't understand him, sprawls on a sofa, with his foot on a chair; while Florizel fidgets from his seat to the window and back again, on the look-out for Sheridan.

Brummel is annoyed by topics in which he cannot shine, and dislikes the presence of Brinsley, because his humour is trenchant and his dress bedabbled with drink, which latter crime is heinous in the estimation of the beau, who spends four hours daily over his toilet, and changes his linen thrice. Brinsley is a waning star, twenty years his senior; but Brummel is averse to rivalry of any kind, and likes to rule the roast. He is no fonder of my lord Osmington, because the latter pretends horseyneess, a fashion among the *nobless* which the beau is resolved to crush. He is closely mixed up, too, in the doings of the prize-ring

—is president, indeed, of the Pugilistic Club—reeking with mingled perfumes of the stable and the tavern, and prates quite openly of the uproarious and unseemly establishment which swallows his large income. Brummel considers all this to be in the worst taste. He disapproves of Cyprians, because they are too *prononcées* and say shocking things, and is never seen, as other dandies are, in the opera-box of Harriet Wilson, the reigning impropriety. He looks down on girls of birth as giggling idiots, who know nothing, preferring the society of duchesses, whom he treats with superb condescension; and they, as a rule, take his notice as a favour; for, though the grandson of a manservant, he has come somehow to be the *arbiter elegantiarum*, and rules the blue-blooded section with an iron-lined, velvet glove. This is curious, considering that his wit was always of a thin and trickling kind, which never produced a repartee such as would bear to be repeated. Perhaps his influence is due to a sarcastic tongue and cool, impertinent assurance, which frightens silly people. That the influence was all but paramount was frequently shown. On one occasion, to oblige a park-keeper, the great man gave out that breakfast without curds and whey was an outrage upon decency; whereupon all true Corinthians rushed helter-skelter after the commodity, and those whose cows were easy of access realized fortunes. Brummel's social creed was

the exact antithesis of my lord Osmington's. Noise and conspicuous show were vulgar ; persons of low-breeding to be avoided. His first axiom was that if John Bull turns round to stare, your dress (most important of sublunary matters) is too stiff, too tight, or too loud—there is something wrong about it. His own attire was severely correct and simple, varying by delicate gradations with the season and the weather. His horses and carriages were of the best, but never showy ; each of his canes and snuff-boxes a gem. Though his following were obedient and his circle large, there were a few houses whose doors remained closed, in spite of every blandishment. My lady Gwydyr, for example, set her face against the beau, despite the support of the Prince, declaring that his superior airs were veneer ; that an unnatural stiffness betrayed the rough handiwork of Nature's journeyman ; that under the polish lurked a petty, trivial, and ungrateful nature—in which estimate her ladyship was right.

The conversation which rendered the beau sulky was on the subject of boxing, to which sport his royal friend had given much attention, since he found it expedient to abandon the turf ; a pastime that involved blood-letting, and offended the nerves of Mr. Brummel. How could a man who patronized duchesses be expected to take interest in muscular persons who began life as butchers or bargees ?

What pleasure could he find in discussing "body-punishers" or the excellences of the rival schools? What was it to him that the country about Bristol should turn out a succession of fistic heroes of primest quality, who were said by one faction to bear away the palm, while another swore roundly that the Jews in the metropolis were the deffest set of pugilists? The noble members of the Pugilistic Club in Bond Street were for ever cackling over the two styles, pitting the exponents of one against the other, appraising the powers of Mendoza, the Hebrew, or Molineux, the nigger, till the beau grew weary, and yawned at the mere mention of ropes, subsiding into sullen silence. My lord Osmington was recognized by Corinthians as a connoisseur, and stoutly upheld the merits of the Bristolians; while his Grace of York, who thought himself a judge, was just as hot a partisan of Mendoza and the Jews. The Prince of Wales sided with my lord; for Thomas Cribb was a Bristolian, and the said Thomas was attached to the person of Florizel, in conjunction with the Bow Street officer, by reason of his thews and sinews. Now, we all know, or else we are disgracefully ignorant, that the head of the Bristol school—*ἀναξ ἀνδρών*—was Jem Belcher, of respected memory, and that Thomas Cribb was matched against him for a purse of two hundred guineas. They were both of the same faction, hence a special interest, for 'twas vastly interesting

to watch the struggle between two warriors who employed the same tactics. We also know that Jem, as Champion of England, was compelled (although he had lost an eye) to meet whoever challenged him, or else resign the belt. Cribb, erst a coal-porter, was in the best of health, while Belcher was ailing; hence, when the former polished off his rival in thirty-five minutes, there was a frightful outcry and an unchaining of evil passions. Jem's supporters insisted that their man was unfairly beaten, for in the eighteenth round his only eye was closed, and through aiming wildly in the dark he sprained his wrist. Party spirit rose to frenzy against Cribb (who was quite an estimable person), and many loudly declared that he had no right to take the belt. It was in vain that the upright Thomas vanquished all opponents, tumbled over his antagonists like ninepins on the turf of slaughter at Moulsey Hurst. Amateurs and mob cried out that Jem and Thomas must have another bout; though why a second contest would be fairer than the first it is difficult to say, since Jem was still one-eyed, and Cribb could scarcely be expected to put out one of his own to reduce the pair to a level. That Thomas should have been attached to the Prince of Wales may have had something to do with the uproar, for at this time his Royal Highness was unpopular with the mob, in consequence of the unceasing screeches of the Megæra, who resided at

Blackheath. Be that as it may, the second fight came off, and George won heavily on the triumphant Thomas, and for a while was cockahoop, for though his saloons were golden his pockets were always empty, and he began to see in his pet bruiser a goose that might lay valuable eggs. Vere, as he sprawled at full length, was suggesting a match between the new champion and the Hebrew Mendoza, which idea was vociferously applauded by his Grace of York; but the Prince of Wales threw cold water, and declined to bet with his favourite brother, for, indeed, that martial bishop was as poor as the Heir-Apparent, and when he lost his wagers had not the wherewithal to pay.

This was awkward, and the conversation, trenching on delicate ground, began to flag. The opportune arrival of Lord Alvanley was a relief to all, specially to the beau, who was tired of playing second fiddle; but the Adonis looked glum again when the new-comer began harping on the same objectionable string, lisping of a fresh excitement advertised in the *Morning Chronicle*. "A turn-up at Westminster Pit between Belcher's celebrated dog Trusty and Jacco Maccacco, the marvellous Hoxton ape." How novel and engaging! A special grand combat for a prize of one hundred guineas, to be followed by a bear-fight. Entrancing! Sure their Royal Highnesses could not resist so tempting a bill of fare, but would honour the

spree with their presence? The Duke shook his head in doubt, for he was oppressed by his brother's unpalatable hints about meeting debts of honour, and there was grievous uncertainty as to the winning of stakes when four-footed champions were concerned.

"I'm not sure about monkeys," he remarked, with the gravity which the subject required. "They're ticklish cattle that submit to severe shakings while they claw at the jugular vein with the acumen of an experienced anatomist. There's none of the pit-pat ruffianing, careful strategy, and honest give and take which raises the ring to a fine art. This Jacko, I'm told, has killed nine dogs already. I don't like apes. Shall you go in for it, George?"

"No," returned his brother, shortly, rising and drumming on the window-pane. There was something on his mind, or he would not have been so eager for the coming of Mr. Sheridan. Since fleeing before Caroline and returning to town, he had been a prey to the doleful dumps.

"You're plaguy sharp," grumbled the Duke. "Are there any new worries? Brummel's as cross as sticks. That brand-new costume, Alvanley, ought to smooth his feathers. Come, Brummel, cheer up! He's dying for your opinion of those breeches."

My lord glanced with complacency at his nether garments, and moved his plump limbs about before

the offended censor, who was not to be so easily mollified. "Turn round," he snarled, with a pedagogue's severity. "Closer to the light! What do you call those?"

"Leathers," returned the dandy. "Ain't they rather neat?"

"Take them off directly!"

"I beg you won't," laughed the Duke.

"I thought them nice," murmured Alvanley, chap-fallen, "and kept 'em on instead of dressing, that you might look at 'em."

"My dear fellow, at your time of life, and with your pursiness, you should know better," replied Brummel, washing his finger-tips in a wine-glass with a ludicrous pantomime of disgust. "Some people are too conceitedly forgetful of their figures to learn. Impossible knees, my poor dear friend, most utterly impossible knees!"

"Never mind the knees, Alvanley," observed the Duke, with a peal of laughter. "It's your face that's your fortune with the ladies."

"I wonder at that," growled the beau, "with features like a warming-pan."

Lord Alvanley reddened, and muttered, "As good as a nose like a broken knocker."

Though the beau was permitted the licence of a court jester, a storm seemed brewing; and Florizel, the amiable, hastened to clear the air.

"Is it true, Brummel," he inquired, "that while we were at Doncaster you were in the country? An unusual move."

"Yes. I was staying with the Abercorns."

"I thought they couldn't abide you?"

"No more they can," Brummel drawled carelessly, "so I was resolved to be seen in their house. They're not on speaking terms, you know, and I presumed it probable that one would think me the guest of the other. And so they did, and were amazing civil when I drove up with Robinson and the luggage. Good liquor, and not a bad cook; but the country is really too shockingly ill-kept. A sort of healthy grave that wants sweeping and garnishing. Dirty roads without pavement. Monotonous, too; enough to give one the blues. All birds and trees and cows are nauseatingly alike; while every bumpkin smells of damp straw and cart-grease, or bad blacking."

"That's a fact," assented Alvanley, who was still examining his knees. "The true use of the country is to find food for the towns. Any one wilfully making his home there, who isn't a greengrocer or a butterman, is guilty of a waste of existence and a gross abuse of mercies."

"Talking of blacking," remarked Vere, "how about Colonel Kelly? I admire a man who's unflinchingly true to his colours. In Kelly the ruling passion was strong in death; for when his house was

afire t'other day, he perished in trying to save his collection of favourite boots."

"So I heard," said Florizel. "Whether he lived or died was of little consequence to anybody, but I should like to know who's got his valet. A phoenix! Knows the secret, doubtless, of the colonel's inimitable blacking."

All eyes were mechanically directed, with an inquiring gaze, on Brummel, who was equal to the occasion.

"I know the secret," he said, clearing his throat with dignity, "and you shall have it gratis. Two parts of lampblack to one of the best champagne, to be used fizzing. That is the simple but essential point. I half thought of throwing over Robinson and taking the fellow, but reflected that Robinson would die of it. He's gone to Lord Plymouth now, on a salary of two hundred pounds a year."

"I'd take the place myself for that," sighed the Duke of York. "Have you heard that Lumley's broke? Pity, for he fed us well."

"One gets bored with the same dishes and the same faces," yawned the censor. "No amphytrion should last more than two seasons, unless he changes his cook twice a year, and keeps a roster of guests to prevent their meeting too often at his table."

"Oh," objected the Prince of Wales, "better to change his friends than his cook, for real artists are

scarce. My Weltje, for instance, and Ude of Crockford's stand alone; couldn't replace 'em at any price."

"True," lisped pensive Alvanley. "Might be awkward, though—mightn't it? Some men are so ridiculous that if you cut 'em they'd want to know why, and call you out. Not that that would affect me, as I don't fight."

"There's nothing worth fighting for, save lovely woman," Vere announced from his sofa.

"Yet the sex leads you a pretty dance," laughed the Duke of York. "What are all their names? Pepita, Ildefonza, Julia, Isabel——"

"I love them all! Here's a toast, gentlemen. The three W's—wit, wine, woman; all good, but the last best—when you're not bound to her," Vere said, with a sly wink at Florizel. "I'm sure you'll all agree that marriage is an odious and selfish monopoly."

"Yet wives change husbands nowadays," smirked Brummel, "as frequently as we cravats, with less crumpling."

"Woman," sighed the Prince of Wales, "being a rib, is nothing more than a mean and crooked part of man. Heigho! As for marriage, it has but two happy days—the first and last—not even two sometimes, ay de mi! Chaise wheels!" he cried, suddenly jumping up. "It must be Sherry. Good Heavens! wherever did he get that fine turn-out?"

Mr. Sheridan, unkempt and slovenly, reeking of the tavern, shambled in and tumbled on the sofa beside Vere. It was plain, by the thickness of his utterance and the tears of the tankard on his vest, that he had already been indulging; but as he joyously returned the greetings of his friends, his eye was as bright as a raven's, his bloated visage was puckered into grins, while his sides were shaking like jelly.

"Oh, such fun!" he was beginning, when Florizel cried, with impatience—

"I sent you a special note, begging you to be here early."

"Indeed, sir? I never got it."

"Never *read* it, you mean. Popped it into that cormorant bag with all the others. Too bad—too bad!"

His Royal Highness was familiar with his crony's eccentricities, which sometimes led to unexpected *contretemps*. It was well known that on a central table in his study there lay a sack, into which all letters and notes found their way, unopened, unless marked *private and important*—communications from actors, scene-shifters, authors, constituents, place-hunters, bores—and that the mass grew and grew until the bag was replete to bursting. Then he would ring, and say, "Remove that rubbish; they've answered themselves by this time," and so saved himself much labour. Sometimes, however, his in-

attention to letters told against himself. Going once to the bank, where he was accustomed to be paid his salary as Receiver of Cornwall, and where he was able sometimes to borrow small sums, he asked humbly if he could be obliged with twenty pounds. "Certainly," said the clerk; "with fifty or a hundred." Sheridan, all smiles and gratitude, replied that a hundred would be opportune. "Two, sir, or three?" went on the clerk; and at every rise in the sum the surprise of the borrower increased. It transpired presently that, in consequence of the falling in of some fine, a sum of twelve hundred pounds had been credited to the Receiver-General, and that Brinsley, not having unsealed the letter apprising him of the fact, had been struggling with a peck of troubles, unaware of his good luck.

"Well, never mind," said the cordial George; "better late than never, though a bad lot at best. That carriage of yours is new."

"Not paid for, on my life!" protested Sherry. "The coachman, poor devil, is without wages—likes me too well to go, and I prefer to be all of a piece."

"Where is the money gone to?" inquired York of the Gothic ceiling. "Somebody must have it, I suppose. As for me, my pocket's without a groat."

"Yes. I'm fortunate in my servants. They prefer stopping, knowing they'll be paid some day. Do you see that fellow I brought round with me? There—

shaking his fist, sir, at your august colonnade. How dares he? Let's string him up for treason."

"I don't know him," cried George, with surprise, after a cautious survey from behind a curtain, for he was accustomed to the sight of importunate men hanging about the premises, whom he generally knew too well.

"I know him!" returned the jubilant Sherry, rubbing his soiled hands. "My most troublesome dun—a Stafford man, a constituent—but I've succeeded in fooling the nuisance. He came on me unawares, the sneak, in a towering rage; but I met his railing with such radiant good-will that he couldn't get a word in edgewise. How could I pay him while Gunter's account for dinners lay unreceipted on the table? 'I'll have my money,' persisted the fellow, 'and will wait no longer.' 'Show me how, and I'll settle with pleasure,' says I. 'You should know best,' says he sullenly. 'You know Gunter,' says I, delivered of an idea. 'He's solvent, I think?' 'Of course he is,' says he. 'Perhaps you would take his bill,' says I, grinning sweetly. 'Certainly, to oblige,' says he. 'That's all right,' says I, handing him the folded paper. 'Here's Gunter's bill. Pray make what use you can of it.'"

"That's splendid," laughed the Duke of York. "I wish I could get round 'em that way."

"He didn't take it?" inquired Alvanley.

“When he saw what it was, he smiled and said, ‘Mr. S., you are incorrigible,’ and became quite good-humoured. ‘Excuse me, my dear sir,’ I finished up. ‘The Prince of Wales expects me, who shall hear of your generous forbearance. My carriage waits, and if you like I’ll take you with me to Carlton House.’ Of course he was enchanted at the notion of being presented to his Royal Highness in a private and social manner, and said, pressing my hand with fervour, ‘To Carlton House! My very dear friend, never mention the debt again.’ ‘I never will,’ says I; and trundled him here, chatting all the way and cracking jokes, and when we arrived, slammed the carriage door upon his leg, bidding the coachman drive to his hotel. ‘But I thought I was to be presented to the Prince,’ he stammered. ‘Oh dear, no,’ I said, and so left him, and there he is still!”

A shade passed over the face of Florizel as he drummed his fingers with petulance. “You’ll be good enough,” he grumbled, “not to drag me into your jokes, for my hot water’s deep enough, without the addition of yours. I’m glad you’ve come, though; for something must be done. It’s getting unbearable, so listen and apply your mind. How are we to raise the wind?”

An ominous pause, while each glanced at the other and shook his head, unable to cope with so abstruse a problem. Those present had been a good many

years out of long clothes, and had come to be painfully aware of the extreme difficulty of raising that obstinate wind. The nut was too hard to crack; so, seizing each his bottle, they quaffed their Lafitte in silence.

"Nobody who hasn't suffered can gauge the horror of impecuniosity," declared Florizel. "Money, or rather the want of it, has been my curse through life, and now I solemnly swear that I can't put my finger on a sixpence."

"Unless a clock is wound at intervals," acquiesced Sherry, "it won't go tick, tick, for ever."

"Ah, tick has been my bane, and George's," sighed his Grace of York. "Won't Hamlet the jeweller do anything?"

"No. Nor Howard and Gibbs, the usurers, or Jew King, or Solomon King of Clarges Street. Tried 'em all. No thoroughfare."

This was a grievous announcement.

"Demmy!" began Lord Osmington. "Is it as bad as that? I should be delighted to assist your Royal Highness, if——"

"I know—I know," interrupted George with the glacial tinge of hauteur wherewith he could check liberties on occasion. "You would provide us out of your superfluity, no doubt, but for the ravenous maw of Pepita, and Annita, and Ildefonza, and Mary Anne, and all the rest of your Noah's Ark. We never borrow from our friends, that's understood."

"If we could only draw upon our enemies!" said Brinsley, with a merry twinkle.

"That sumptuously furnished sideboard," lisped Alvanley, "must be worth mints. The wine-coolers alone——"

"Pooh! Stuff! If I pawn the silver, 'twill be all over the town in a day. People are so ready to believe ill of me, and I do try to be economical."

"Really," gibed Vere, taking up a plate. "This Worcester china, I've been told, is worth three hundred guineas the piece——"

"It's impossible to dine except off Worcester," declared the censor, with conviction.

"This plate I hold is monstrous pretty as well as expensive," observed Vere. "The little dear in the corner is the living image of my Pepita—'tis, by Gad!"

"Then take it home and hold your tongue," retorted his Royal Highness. "I've been treated shamefully. George the First's pension when he came was fixed at seven hundred thousand, and before he died the country paid debts to the tune of five hundred thousand without a word. George the Second had eight hundred thousand a year, and his queen a hundred thousand, and I, his great grandson, must live upon a pittance—a mere pittance, by the Lord Harry—or be abused like a fish-fag. A royal personage, they think, is to be born without feelings, to live only for the good of the State and the con-

venience of his creditors; direct his ways by cold reason like machinery, and support life on tasteless diet. That's not my view."

"Hardly," murmured Brummel, toying with the china.

"I hold human existence to be so unsatisfactory in itself that wit, flavour, laughter, brightness, perfume, have been given to charm our pained steps along the rugged valley, just as we give children jam to take their powders in."

"So we dine off fragile crockery," laughed Vere, "worth three hundred guineas a plate."

"Curse the plates!" snapped the Prince. "Sherry, you are the only man of resource among us. Suggest something. The absorbing question of the moment is, how to raise the wind."

Sheridan knitted his brows and confessed that he was nonplussed. Just now things were really desperate; for a vindictive silversmith named Jeffrey had recently published a pamphlet detailing a catalogue of wrongs due to the thriftlessness of George. His claims were sifted by Lord Moira and others, and proved to be no claims at all; but, unhappily, so much had been said about his Royal Highness's liabilities that credit was poisoned. Mr. and Mrs. Bull gave credence to any libel, and sighed over the delinquencies of the prodigal.

"Parliament," mumbled Brinsley.

"Parliament indeed ! You must be doosed fuddled to talk such stuff. Alvanley, ring for a carriage for Mr. Sheridan before he's too hopelessly drunk. Parliament ! I vow that Pepita or Ildefonza would give more practical advice."

"Ay," nodded Vere ; "or Annita or Mary Anne. Quite so. The darlings are good at advice, though they'll never take any themselves, except as to the value of diamonds."

"Drabs out of the gutter !" the Prince snorted with rising wrath. "Pitch mayn't be touched without defilement. I wonder at a great noble like you. It's disgusting."

"The darlings are no worse than Madam Clarke, the Duke of York's Mary Anne," sneered Osmington. "Your Royal Highness's friend is a plumber's child, I think ?"

"Leave Mrs. Clarke alone," grunted the Duke of York. "You're glad enough to attend her parties."

"Of course," replied Vere ; "for she invites the whole Noah's Ark, which keeps them in a seraphic temper—and is handsome and liberal of Mrs. C."

"By-the-by, Frederick, that's something I want to speak to you about," the Prince of Wales observed gloomily. "You're too thick with Mrs. Clarke, and there'll be a bother some day with the public."

"You want all the scandal to yourself," blurted out his brother.

"Hush! There's nothing so debasing as low female society. She's a designing minx, or I'm no judge of womankind, who'll turn on you. It's all very well to see life out of doors—I've nothing to say against that,—but to receive plebeians at your own table—for it is your own table—is another thing. 'Tis notorious that Mary Anne Clarke's brother is a tinman, while Miss Taylor, her dear friend, is daughter of a common stonemason, and they are always in the house. You'll allow that they are not fit company for the King's son."

"When the fox preacheth, beware geese!" bawled jovial Frederick, on whose modicum of brain the Lafitte was taking effect.

"It doesn't become me to advise, I know," George said, with increasing sadness; "but I love you, Frederick, and should be grieved to see you in a pickle. Money bothers one can't help, and, after all, they are no crime, only petty annoyances. You're just the Samson to snore on Delilah's lap while she snips, and awake astonished at your baldness. It's whispered that she takes bribes to use her influence over you as regards the army. Of course I know you'd do nothing mean, but John Bull is uncharitable; so do, pray, be prudent."

"She never talks to me of business," answered the Commander-in-chief. "I've very little coin to give the poor thing, so she must scratch it together as she

can; and, then, she's so amusing. You should see her strut up and down the room with a curtain for a train, for all the world as stiff as Old Snuffy in person. Such a gift of mimicry. 'Tis enough to make one screech !”

Brummel glanced at the jolly scapegrace who could talk thus of his mother, and a faint smile of cynical disdain played about his lips. Frederick's articulation was becoming laboured; while the host, who was in desponding mood, drank bumper after bumper without speaking, and despair sat throned upon his brow. When intoxicated, George had the faculty of looking upon himself as on another, as though his spirit, escaping from its tenement, could float above and survey without glozing bias the mournful spectacle.

“I'm an unfortunate creature,” he hiccupped thickly, after a long interval of bibbing meditation. “Not an interest to make life worth having; not a halfpenny to spend! A pauper starving in a gilded temple, with an army of duns upon the doorstep. Better to be a wooden idol that can't feel. I wish—I wish—it was all over.”

“Starving with Weltje for a cook!” roared boisterous Sheridan. “Care killed a cat. Play us a soothing stave on the violoncello, while Brummel airs his tenor. Whate'er betide, be gay.”

“Why?” retorted the Prince, fiercely. “What cause have I for joy? I asked to go with my regiment

to Portugal. The King feared it might make me popular, and snubbed me. He won't even let me be interested in the volunteers, or take to anything that would draw me from bad habits. He throws me back upon myself, and always has—bidding me fill my mind with love for that cursed woman. What a pattern father! May——”

“Hush! hush!” interrupted Brinsley; for George was apt, when his tongue was loosed by drink, to fling strong epithets at his papa, which, in sooth, were well deserved. “Look at me, sir. Sure wretched man was never in worse plight than I, and yet I'm jolly. My purse is as bare as yours. There's not so much in it as would pay a hackney coach, though yesterday I managed to make a haul by a prodigious sacrifice. Hard come and easy go. A fellow burst in and sold me—*me*, with my experience! Listen, sir, instead of weeping, for I know 'twill make you laugh. The notes—the last I've a chance of seeing this many a day—were on my desk, crisp, fluttering little strangers, when in burst a tall thin gentleman like a ramrod out of a musket. ‘Glad to see you so well furnished,’ he remarked, before I could hide the store. ‘Tisn't for you,’ says I, with presence of mind, ‘but to meet a debt of honour. They always take precedence of bills or notes of hand.’ ‘Is that so?’ says he; and, before I could stop him, pulls his note from a bag and flings it on the fire. ‘Mine's a debt of

honour now,' says he; and after that how could I refuse him? Was it, or not, on his part a stroke of genius?"

Neither of the scapegraces were in cue to enjoy the jest. George was too low to listen or to smile: Frederick had found his level on the floor, and, occupying a cosy place upon the hearthrug, murmured, "Mary Anne;" at which familiar name Lord Osmington stirred on his couch, and rolled over and snored again.

"Peace lull thy slumber," chuckled Brinsley. "His vision is of another charmer, far cleverer a Mary Anne than thine! I swear I heard the early village cock, or was it fancy—eh, Mr. Brummel?"

Every one else having succumbed to Morpheus save the two favourites, who loathed each other, they glared for a minute or two across the table with the antipathy of canine rivals. The beau's mincing affectations were odious to Sheridan; so, without more ado, he staggered to his feet, and, arranging some cushions by the side of unconscious York, was soon asleep. The Prince of Wales, his ambrosial curls pillowed on a dish of apricots, was straying in Elysian fields with parted lips like an innocent babe; so Brummel, who never drank too much, rose with a yawn and stretch, and rang the bell for his sedan. Intoxicated gentlemen on the floor are like swine in a sty; so, disliking as he did aught that suggested

rural sights or smells, the beau ensconced himself luxuriously in the white satin interior of his conveyance, and was borne by a pair of lusty porters, still softly smiling, to his bijou residence in Chapel Street.

CHAPTER V.

THE SLUICERY.

'Tis easier to point the way for others than to keep quite straight one's self. The forebodings of the imprudent Prince of Wales with regard to the still less prudent Frederick were realized before twelve months had passed, and democrats were amply provided with texts for oratorical discourse.

It was more now than the ailment of impecuniosity that troubled the Commander-in-chief, though his trouble grew out of the commonplace disease which afflicted both the scapegraces. He, like the elder, became harassed by a "dreadful woman," who was no other than the once worshipped Mary Anne. Some men are fickle; some women greedy of guineas. The reigning sultana occupied a fine mansion in Gloucester Place, and indulged in the expensive amusement of organizing banquets for the demi-monde. The butcher's book and the baker's gaped appealingly in vain. Love, as sometimes happens, was chased out of window by the household bills; for,

as Frederick aptly argued, how could he supply her extravagant wants when quite cleaned out himself? Influenced by the appeals of brother Florizel, his Grace of York waxed cold. Her position being untenable, Mary Anne fled to Blackheath, where, in the neighbourhood of the other dreadful woman, she reflected at leisure on the hollowness of this our planet. Even at Blackheath one cannot exist without cash; so in time the luckless lady was ejected by an adamantine landlord, who, deaf to agonized prayers, declined to give up her chattels. She wrote to the martial hero, warning him that among the seized effects were bundles of letters full of hearts and darts and other things beside, which for his own future peace it behoved him to purchase instantly. Horror-stricken, he flew to Carlton House, craved advice, poured forth his grief. How should he know, he whimpered, what folly those notes contained? And she had sworn, on the honoured ashes of a deceased relative, that they were all burnt. Oh, naughty, faithless Mary Anne! Money, money, money, blackmail, anguish! The disconsolate cronies gathered in sympathetic circle to discuss what was to be done, and their deliberations always brought them to the same *cul-de-sac*—how to raise the wind. It was obvious that the crafty landlord would scorn promises and notes of hand; would insist on cash, and a great deal of it; and the cronies knew that cash would be as

easy for them to get as to swallow St. Paul's and the Abbey. "What was it you wrote? Do think," reiterated George. "If 'twas no more than hearts and darts, let them publish the twaddle and welcome."

Unlucky Fred thought harder than he had ever thought before, and at last remembered with woe that, adopting the sobriquet bestowed by amusing Mary Anne, he had frequently written of his royal mamma under the style and title of "Old Snuffy." Now this was particularly awful, because Frederick was her Majesty's darling, the only one of all the sons who could ever dip fingers into her purse, even to the depth of half an inch. She was rolling in constantly increasing wealth, while the princes were out at elbows. Never again would she dole out sparse guineas, if it should chance to come to her knowledge that she was nicknamed "Old Snuffy." This was bad enough, but worse remained behind. Between the Commander-in-chief and one of his brothers there was no love lost, and it was whispered pretty loudly in fashionable circles that the dearest ambition of the latter was to humiliate his Grace of York, and occupy his martial boots. There are always grovelling worms ready to pander to the least lovely desires of the great. One Colonel Wardle appeared upon the scene, and assumed the virtues of a patriot. He sought out abandoned Ariadne. On certain conditions her debts were to be paid, a pension was to be settled, and a

good round sum provided to meet the expenses of an establishment. The point at which the colonel aimed was no less than the ruin of the Duke, for Ariadne was herself to produce letters, and confess, with a blush, that for years past she had lived by trafficking in the sale of military commissions. She penned a dainty note to Fred, stating what he might expect unless he was the highest bidder for the scraps. Ariadne could not exist on nothing, and with poignant sorrow she regretted, etc. "Oh, ruthless, faithless Mary Anne!" sighed her quondam swain. But what use was there in sighing while she screamed out for gold?

She was interviewed by Sheridan, whose persuasive accomplishments we have admired; abused by Lord Osmington; implored by Alvanley: but to no purpose. They might storm, cajole, bully; she snapped her pink fingers in their face. It resolved itself with monotonous persistency into that weary, dreary problem of how to raise the wind; and the wind, as usual, declined altogether to be raised.

In due course, hush-money not being procurable altogether to gag the mouth of Ariadne, a committee of inquiry sat upon the Commander-in-chief. The new basket of foul linen was carried into the House of Commons with a flourish of trumpets, and Mary Anne appeared daily there in a bewitching bonnet in the character of first washerwoman. The mischievous

portion of the public, sated with eldrich shrieks from Caroline, were charmed with the fresh and piquant picture of royal manners, while the lower and less humorous class growled, and democrats preached sermons. Love letters were read, which turned out mawkish and illiterate effusions; the ones about Snuffy were with prodigious efforts suppressed. This was disappointing; but Mary Anne made up for it by startling evidence, and a hint that one letter had been stolen which directly implicated the Duke as having permitted her to dabble in commissions. It leaked out, also, that in two and a half years her expenditure had reached the extent of seventeen thousand pounds. From poverty-stricken Fred she had drawn no more than two thousand a year. From what mysterious source, then, did she get the remaining twelve?

The missing letter! Who had stolen it, and what could it contain? There was an exciting search, like that of blood-hounds after a slave. A Captain Sandon, who wist not its value, found it on a table, and pocketed it as an autograph. How odd to leave such a letter about, unless 'twas done on purpose! The captain, who perceived that he was about to be made a cat's-paw for the injuring of his Commander-in-chief, completely lost his head—stammered, lied in the witness-box, and made so sorry a figure that he was actually ordered to Newgate. He prevaricated—per-

jured himself. The letter was burnt. No, it wasn't; for he never set eyes on such a thing in all his life. Presently, in fumbling for a kerchief to mop his perspiring brow, he drew out something which fell upon the floor. Sensation! Why did he bring it in his pocket? Was he also a traitor? Upon examination, the letter was proved a forgery; for Mary Anne could write Fred's blundering hand as well as he could himself. When he swore that it was never penned by him, and pointed out slight caligraphic discrepancies, she answered, with a sneer, that he wrote two hands—one before, one after dinner. The string of witnesses contradicted themselves and each other in so startling a way that Parliament stood aghast. What disclosures, too, as to Fred's associates! What nuts for the *sans-culottes* was the account of his evenings spent in guzzling with artisans! A tinman, a shoemaker, a quack pill-vendor had frequently, despite the warnings and protestation of gentleman George, found their legs under his hospitable mahogany. The syren who invited these guests was clearly shown to belong to the lowest type of *intrigante*, who would sell her grandmother for profit. In reply to Florizel's snorts of vexed amazement, Sherry gave vent to the boisterous laugh, which, despite his protest that he was jolly, grew daily more forced and harsh, and vowed that 'twould soon blow over. "His Royal Highness," he said, "has been

studying character. When I was working for the stage, you've no idea of the queer company I kept." "You and York are different people," rebuked the haughty Heir-Apparent; to which the other retorted, with a bow and a wink, "Indeed? It seems to me that we are precisely the same sort of people." Ugly details certainly came out. Officers admitted, with reluctance, that they had indeed advanced large sums to Mary Anne in exchange for promises of promotion; and it did appear that the jovial gentleman was induced to do things when drunk which he totally forgot when sober. This was a time when the public were straining after reform in all directions; but Fred was too sensually indolent to trouble his mind with irksome administrative changes, and so became the scapegoat of corrupt practices, which usage had been accustomed to condone.

There is no doubt that in this dirty business a shrewd and vindictive adventuress was pitted by unseen hands against an ingenuous and confiding sybarite. For the defence, it was urged that York was beloved by the soldiery; that the words of Mary Anne must be taken *cum grano*, not from her demeanour and frailty only, but by reason of her account of her life. On the other side, Wardle and Sir Francis Burdett indulged in flamboyant perorations; and the conclusion arrived at was, that his Grace meant well, but was not happy in the manner of his proceedings.

He was acquitted by a low majority, and in pique threw up his command. A *locum tenens*, however, was placed in his jack-boots till such time as the scandal should be forgotten.

The effect of these disclosures, coming on top of a series of unfortunate stories, of which the worst was always made, could not be other than deplorable. Attentive and credulous ears were turned to the complainings from Blackheath, for the people were in a humour to believe anything. The country was over-taxed. Year by year, on account of a continuance of war, burthens became heavier. Harvests were bad, and the farmers much distressed. The popularity of those who, in the midst of growing difficulties, could revel in chambering and wantonness, and live to outward appearance in excessive luxury, was gravely compromised; and the princes failed to see that what the two first kings of the Brunswick line could do with impunity in them was heinous crime. Meanwhile, their misery was intense enough to condone many peccadilloes, suffering as they were from their chronic complaint—how to raise the wind. Oh dear, that annoying question! 'Twas well that Old Snuffy's obriquet had been kept from her ears. The council of cronies decided *nem. con.* that Fred the delinquent, whose folly had most shaken royal credit, must throw himself into the breach, and do the amiable to the wrinkled miser, of whom he was the darling idol.

The scapegraces wanted pocket-money; they wanted also to buy up some still fluttering fragments of foul linen, which yet remained in the basket. Mary Anne was capable of brewing fresh storms. "An angry woman, right or wrong," murmured Sherry, "was never known to hold her tongue;" while Vere made unfeeling and jocose comparisons between the relative obnoxiousness of a royal wife and royal mistress. Which was the most uncomely story, people were asking themselves—that of the man who deserted his poor, dear, immaculate angel spouse; or that of the other, who allowed a woman of no repute to don the breeches of Commander-in-chief? The mania for fouling nests became quite modish, and royalty and aristocracy were equally offensive in the eyes of an outraged nation. Snuffy must be beguiled into disgorging, for it was too bad that she should be squatting in the counting-house counting out her money, while the prodigals were shivering in rags. Her Majesty was an excellent woman of business, clever at a bargain (too clever, some said); a long-headed, successful speculator, who had no call to squander her beloved hoards for the behoof of boys of forty-five. The attempt had to be made nevertheless; so Frederick started on a forlorn hope to see what could be won at Windsor. The fond mamma was charmed by unusual attentions. She killed a fattened calf, and invited the dear youth to be her

partner at whist. Now, Fred hated whist almost as much as he loathed the society of drivelling or cunning old women—the crowd of Court harridans, vinegar-visaged virgins, wheezy ladies-in-waiting; but having leapt into the breach, there was no retreat. Snuffy was grinning and smirking with all her yellow teeth, so he submitted to be bored to death with the best grace he knew how to assume. It was of all things most important that she should be kept in good humour; so for hours he sat patiently at the card-table, wondering how much she would bestow, counting imaginary treasure-bags, and sadly neglecting the game. Once or twice he was roused by a an-tap, sharply warned not to throw away his honours—a stray arrow, which quivered in his heart—and becoming more and more absent, made such blunders that her Majesty forfeited her stakes. With that she lost her temper, which was never of the sweetest, and flung from the table, with words of shrill reproach. What did he mean by making her lose five shillings? He hastened to apologize; she retorted with ungenerous innuendoes anent stupid beggars, and was only pacified at last by his paying out of his own lean remnant the trifle she had lost. This was scarcely the moment to talk about a loan; so, finding his hard mother and her coterie unbearable, he ruefully returned to London, not only innocent of money-bags, but absolutely out of pocket. The disappointed

conclave could only laugh, for the situation was immensely absurd; but duns hovered around in coveys, and life was a mocking purgatory.

Again my lord Osmington offered temporary help, and Fred would have gladly accepted but for the glowering of George. The Heir-Apparent was proud and obdurate. Vere must never mention the subject again. Poor he might be; would pawn his watch and finger-rings if necessary; but a Prince of Wales could never borrow from his friends.

"Well, then," Lord Osmington said, "there's no use grumbling at home. Sheridan exhorts us to jollity. Sure your Royal Highness will not disdain to accept of entertainment from a crony? May I give an evening out and pay expenses? Organize something racy, calculated to drown care—something to recall happy boyhood, with its frolics and lightness of heart?"

There was no objection to that, though Brummel arched contemptuous eyebrows, for he gauged Vere's notions as to raciness. Sheridan was loud in his applause; but it was plain his gaiety was feigned, and that, laugh as he might, he stood more in need of cheering than any of the glum party. In truth, the year had brought its full cargo of misfortune to the doomed genius, who kept the fox that gnawed concealed within his vest, instead of complaining of the bites. His theatre was both bane and antidote to

him—his only source of income, which income, as we have said, was inconveniently fluctuating by reason of his careless ways. But his misfortunes in this direction were not entirely his fault. Their foundation was laid as early as 1789, when, Drury Lane being declared unsafe, the temple of the Muses was ordered to be rebuilt. To accomplish this, a hundred and fifty thousand pounds had to be raised by debentures bearing interest for a century at five per cent. The amount was speedily subscribed, but from one cause and another the new theatre remained out of operation till the season of '91. During this period of difficulty any man but Sheridan would have retrenched; but it was out of his slipshod Irish character so to do. His style of living was expensive, his mind absorbed by politics, and M.P.'s are paid no wages. He was conducting his affairs in the usual happy-go-lucky style, when a sudden stumbling-block arose which forced itself on his attention. The progress of the new building, that was to replenish the treasury with all possible speed, was checked by the discovery of a dormant patent to Killigrew from Charles II. The shareholders became alarmed, for their subscriptions were applicable to rebuilding only, and could not be used for other purposes. Employing his unrivalled persuasive powers, the manager evolved from somewhere an additional nine thousand pounds, wherewith the patent was annulled. Soon after, it became

further necessary to create forty-seven rent-charges at three thousand pounds apiece. Heavily handicapped, loaded with enormous expenses, the new house was opened at last; but a curse seemed to hang over its fortunes. The opening night past, the care of the manager was fitful as usual, and the patronage of the public unsteady. Attention and hard continuous work might have steered the bark to ultimate success, but who from Sheridan could expect either? He met remonstrance with a flippant jest. The life of a manager, he vowed, was like that of the ordinary at Newgate—a constant superintendence of executions. Was it his fault if audiences hissed the works of authors? He obeyed the will of the public, and extinguished them, performing a perpetual literary massacre. “Play-writing,” he said, “accounts for the employment of that immense crowd of woeworn persons who drain obscure years behind an inkstand, and haunt the street with gaunt, iron-moulded visages. It accounts for the rise in price of paper, which has exhausted the rags of England and Scotland, and even stripped off the last decent covering of Ireland!”

But joking fills no stomachs. His own original muse was inexorably dumb. To stave off collapse he did indeed adapt “Pizarro” and “The Stranger” from the German with a measure of plaudits; but accustomed as they were to see the Kembles in a serie

Of windy atrocities, the public got confused between the plays and their exponents, and dared to profess weariness for the strongly accentuated mannerisms of John and the bombastic queenliness of Siddons. "Give us something new and natural," they cried; and straightway patronized the vagaries of trained animals and the well-meaning attempts of an infant phenomenon. Inexperienced Master Betty, aged twelve, was voted superior in tragic talent to awful Sarah, of whom Sherry said, trembling, that he would as soon think of whispering soft nothings to the Archbishop of Canterbury; while a fudged-up medley, called "The Caravan," was declared to throw Shakespeare in the shade. On the night of its production, Brinsley, who for once had come down to look after his affairs, rushed into the green-room. "Where," he shouted, "is my guardian angel?" "Mr. Reynolds," some one said, "is gone." "Pooh!" he replied, "who cares for authors? Let me embrace the Newfoundland dog, whose genius has taken the town!" This fancy soon passed, and things looked very bad. The Kembles, Miss Farren, Jordan, Suett Bannister, were screaming for salaries, and declined to act. How was the theatre to be kept open, and, if it closed, how were any of them to live? Incurable Sherry chose this inauspicious moment to marry a second wife, and it became necessary, to obtain a stern parent's consent, to raise fifteen thousand pounds by mortgage.

In spite of an accumulating mountain of debt at compound interest, the managerial *ménage* was as profuse as ever, and, public support growing feebler and more feeble, Sherry was involved in constant quarrels with the renters. This was a trifle, breezy and invigorating to a combative Hibernian nature; but as the years followed on each other's heels, prospects grew worse instead of better. When we first looked on Sheridan at Battle Magna, he seemed at as low an ebb as possible; but even worse remained behind, and his affected jollity was put to the severest test.

On the 24th of February, 1809, a blow fell from which he might never recover, although he strove manfully to hide the deepness of the wound. He was delighting the House of Commons with his marvellous oratory, conjuring troops of paradoxes for the fun of knocking them over, astonishing his auditors by the terrible grandeur of his imagery, when a lurid glare illumined the sky, and a messenger arrived in hottest haste to say that Drury Lane was burning. A murmur of sympathy for the illustrious sufferer pervaded the assembly. Drunken and dissolute he might be, but his genius enforced respect. An adjournment was proposed, but he replied in a low voice—the calmest member in the House—that private calamity must never interfere with public business, and continued his speech to the end. “Let the matter rest,” he said, with a strange smile. “My independence

has sometimes been questioned. 'Tis established now, since I've nothing left to depend upon!" When he reached the scene, the performers stood looking on in shuddering groups, and it was plain that hope was dead. Every aperture vomited flames. The cracking walls streamed with lead from the molten roof and gutters. An actress dwelling hard by in Russell Street, ordered a barrel of ale to be broached, and, appearing at a window in a blue satin ball-dress, exhorted the crowd to work. "Search," she shouted, "lest some may yet live within yon furnace! Two guineas and a kiss for every person saved!" But it was too late. Flame licked the feet of the colossal Apollo that crowned the edifice. Forked tongues caressed his limbs. He tottered, swayed, fell with a great crash, like the noise of a park of artillery; and the spectators yelled, as the huge roof fell in with a tremendous shock, "He's gone!" "He's gone!" Sheridan echoed, as he turned away. "His *requiem* and mine. My fortunes are gone with him." Vere and Albanley sought among the crowd, fearing lest their friend should do himself an injury, and found him quietly seated behind a decanter of brandy in the Piazza Coffee House. "My poor, poor fellow!" Albanley stammered, in genuine sorrow. "Don't mind me," Sheridan replied. "Surely a man may enjoy his liquor undisturbed *by his own fireside*." 'Twas easily seen that his calm was born of bravado,

to avoid pity. He never rallied. His talk was lively as of yore, but tinged henceforth with acid. The warm heart that fed those genial eyes with sympathy was never hardened, but he threw up the game. He who was the acme of kindliness became nervous and irritable, delighting in the performance of ignoblest pranks, as if glorying with the divine bitterness of Lucifer in plunging to the depths of the abyss of shame.

The loss by the conflagration was estimated at three hundred thousand pounds, of which—how like Sherry!—only thirty were insured, and that sum was promptly attached by his Grace of Bedford, the ground landlord. A clock of Garrick's perished, an organ of Handel's, and many other relics; and while cultured circles were deploring these mementoes, more evil news arrived in a report that Sheridan was dead. Dead! Was it directly of grief, or a soul-stricken suicide? As it turned out, 'twas but a ruse—first abject trick of the completely fallen angel—to teach whom it concerned to estimate his worth. Such pompous eulogiums, sonorous expressions of regret, poured forth from newspapers and magazines—faults were so blurred by the glamour of the grave—that duns could not but be mollified, delighted to be civil to their resuscitated victim when the corpse revived. They gave him time, and he kept his lips above the flood. He laughed while Despair weighed like a stone

within. For all his external butterfly lightness he could feel, and was not one to drain an inevitable cup and find Oblivion at the bottom. Though all was over, he was condemned—for who might tell how long?—to linger here below, with hollow-eyed Care peering through a comic mask. The ruined manager stood in need of cheering even more than the impetuous scapegraces, and it was generous of my lord Osmington to give them an evening out.

Whither should he conduct his party? Should they, reviving youthful days of Blackstock, Greystock, and Slimstock, sally forth with hats poised on brow, chins swathed in bird's-eye fogles, and visit Tot-hill Fields? Prime shops for fun were there in plenty. At the dog-fancier's theatre, how diversified a crew of fluefakers, dustmen, bakers, lamplighters, hackney-coachmen, to say nothing of a liberal sprinkling of sweeps, lords, grooms, honourables, and donkey-boys! Or should they invade the premises of Suke of St. Giles's, who, with her partner, bogle-eyed Lummy, keeps the celebrated emporium for oysters? No. Although mere lads on the high-road to fifty, their Highnesses were too staid for such frolics. Besides, was not the Heir-Apparent undergoing one of his fits of plain living, on which occasions, flying from the allurements of Weltje, he was wont to swallow simple liver and bacon and black cherry brandy as a tonic for an enfeebled digestion, under-

mined by a surfeit of Curaçoa? A stroll in Tothill Fields implied liberal libations of blue ruin. No. They would take a bowl or two of punch at Mother Butler's, who still kept the Salutation Tavern, where, twenty years before, when the prodigals were really juvenile, Prince Hal took the chair nightly in the company of Nym and Pistol. A buxom Dame Quickly was Mrs. Butler, and her hostelry a genial haunt, where dignity could make place for *deshabille*. Dear heart, what fun there used to be in those old days, when Florizel, the handsome Al-Raschid, explored the hotbeds of lurking vice and crime with Fox and Sheridan and Surrey! *Eheu, fugaces!* Florizel's digestion was a battered hulk; his chin showed signs of doubling, his once slim figure was of ominous rotundity. He didn't feel up to a chaffing match with Suke; but there was nothing against a visit to Madam Butler. It would be killing two birds with a stone, for Thomas Cribb, Champion of England, resided at Madame Butler's in the capacity of amateur Boniface, and all the party found equal pleasure in the society of Thomas Cribb. Brummel, of course, cried off, and took refuge in the boudoir of his most devoted duchess—a move which was not displeasing to Sherry, and charmed Lord Osmington, who wished to go in for a high-pressure orgy, as in the golden past. Thomas should be bidden to summon from their beds a few of his allies for an impromptu bout with the gloves

—trot out the most promising of his pupils for the judgment of the royal connoisseurs. As they walked from Carlton House towards Covent Garden, Vere explained that there was one pupil studying with Thomas now in whom both were extremely interested ; Vere because the boy was one of his own tenantry in Yorkshire, Cribb because in all his days he had never had so promising a neophyte. This lad, with a blooming vista of fistic victories ahead, was Mr. Cyrus Smalley, cousin of Abigel Rowe.

The past twelve months, which had brought wreck and ruin to others, were more kind to Mr. Smalley. His most doleful anticipations became harrowing facts, and he was like to cut his throat. A few weeks after the departure of the party from Battle Magna, grandam Pentecost so far bestirred herself as to call for Abigel and bestow an improving lecture. My lord in his overweening affability, she explained, condescended to take paternal interest in the lowly maid ; was resolved, in generous goodness to a faithful old servant and foster-mother, to give her niece a help upwards in the social scale ; if she turned out well, to make a lady of her. To that end she was to depart for the metropolis forthwith, to undergo a modish curriculum. “The ball is at your feet, you hussy,” concluded the old woman, with, a final slap, “so don’t toss away your chances. To our sex my lord is always liberal, and he owes me

much, more than he can ever pay. If you deal your cards adroitly, he'll settle you in life—do for you what I might have claimed myself once on a time; alackaday, no matter about that. Don't be giddy and heedless, as I was; and don't get into a scrape and come puling back to me. Who knows but what he may marry you—stranger things have chanced—and that one of my blood may be a countess after all?"

Hints of mundane advantage were wasted on the romantic maiden. She laughed at grandaunt's vain and ambitious fancy. My lord might be a father, perhaps, if he so willed it; but a lover—never! What an idea! Miss Abby gave vent to a cachinnation, like a peal of silver bells, at Pentecost's expense, and showed two perfect rows of glittering pearls. Love! She was too young to be pierced yet by Cupid's shaft. Get into scrapes? For what sort of a silly zany did grandaunt take her? Temptations might be dazzling and she simple, but she knew right from wrong, and could protect herself. London—magic word which in its two syllables contains so much! Dear Leo was gone thither to be a gentleman. Now it was her turn, and she was going to be a lady. Oh, rapture!

Clothed in innocence, the maid skipped on the coach beaming with expectant glee, oblivious of cousin Cy as black as thunder in the road, dreaming of the enchantments which awaited her, steeped in the sunny rays of childlike selfishness. Hobbledehoy

Cyrus saw her depart without pity for his pangs, and told himself that he was well rid of such a jade; regretted that he had ever stood 'twixt her and grandam's manual correction; wished that she and he were lying tied together until judgment-day at the bottom of the ocean. She was gone and would never return, would look down on him as scum henceforth, and he endeavoured to persuade himself that he was glad of it. That was sensible; but somehow his even temper became short, and for some months he was gloomy and morose, and went up and down upon the earth seeking whom he might devour.

Now, Yorkshire was always celebrated for its boxing matches. It was incumbent on every lad of spirit to be nimble with his fists. Near Battle Magna was a farmer with five sons, who on their return from market always settled their differences, as the custom was, by force of muscular skill. When about to retire from active labour, the farmer summoned his family and said, unlike La Fontaine's peasant, "Ben, the youngest, can lather all his brothers, so let him manage the farm;" to which decision all bowed without a murmur, deeming it quite fair. Cy, as a brat, had always held his own, and now, aggrieved and solitary, he picked fierce quarrels with his peers, and pummelled them all, and was elated by his growing strength. A fig for sawny pasty-faced Leo and disdainful Abby. They couldn't

hit like him, for all their daintiness and gentility. In the use of his fist, at least, he was their superior; so there was no call to turn up their noses. Waxing bolder through impunity, he attacked one day a gigantic coal-heaver and floored him; and later on achieved a single-handed victory over two dragoons; but, in sooth, they were the worse for drink, and unsteady on their pins.

In spite of the delights of London and the exactions of finishing professors, Abigel, who was a good girl, and nourished a sneaking fondness for her big cousin, found leisure sometimes to write, and amused herself and my lord at breakfast by reading his clumsy answers. The wayward and imperious maiden soon made herself at home in the rambling corridors and saloons of Osmington House by sheer healthy vigour of character. It was to her the domestics looked for orders. The infuriated members of the Noah's Ark were confined to a single wing, and only let out to roam during the period of the matutinal *levée*, like birds out of a gilded cage. At this time she was always busy with her masters, but invariably made her appearance at the ringing of a particular bell, to superintend her benefactor's meal and read the morning news. "'Fore Gad," he reported to the cronies, "the little thing is bottled sunshine! I can't think what I ever did without her. Not but what she has her own way completely. Pepita and the other dears are

troublesome enough, violent and captious and rough-tongued, and 'tis as a rule best to humour them; but if I choose I can storm back and reduce their noise to silence. In the treatment of the sex I've always found the Balmy-Brutal style effective. A dose of argument and then of diabolical vituperation tames the darlings, just as a judicious use of sugar and the whip brings circus-horses to their knees. But do you think I dare try it upon Abigel? Merciful Heaven, no! She keeps us in fine order, but we don't revolt. Hers is a mild sway. She is reasonable to a fault, never wants presents, and I was never so comfortable in my life."

Alvanley often dropped in, for he also fell under the fascination of her whom he dubbed Euphrosyne; even the censor himself, sometimes. They rode together in the park, organized excursions in the suburbs, ~~drove~~ on my lord's coach to Kew or Richmond, were perfectly merry and free. The one cause she had for regret was, that in rides and drives Blackheath was always tabooed, lest haply they might come upon the Dreadful Woman—an accident Abby would have liked; for was not Leo her page? Abby for the present saw little of Leo, chosen child-playmate, but she was young, and so was he; and looking forward to possible opportunities of renewing acquaintance later on, she was content to take things as she found them and enjoy her present splendour. By desire of my lord she opened a regular correspondence with Cy, for the

accounts of that hero's prowess tickled my lord's jaded appetite. "Dash, dash!" he was wont to repeat, as with a hand that might have been less shaky he held his tea-dish to be replenished. "The spark is mettlesome, and seems to improve. The Prince of Wales wins bets over Cribb's battles; why should I not have up the youth and train him properly? One more or less in the menagerie makes no difference. Chicken-fights are poor sport, and among the bumpkins the boy may learn bad tricks. The Bristol school's the only school, and Thomas Cribb's its prophet."

Abigel was scandalized. What! Bring up her cousin as a common bruiser, a low pugilist? Never! How would she hold up her head as she drove down St. James's Street, if prints of cousin Cy stripped to the waist were staring at her from the print shops? On this one point she was not allowed to have her way. Not that my lord tried the Balmy-Brutal. He contented himself with an order not to prate of what she didn't comprehend, or adopt foolish prejudices. "Are we sprung from the loins of William the Conqueror," he gibed, "that we make believe to be so particular?" At the retort she bit her lip and reddened, and held her tongue. But when Cy arrived, she received him with an odd mournfulness, and kissed him as Jephthah may have kissed his daughter when arrayed for sacrifice; and when she contemplated his fine proportions, she gave a little repugnant shrug,

and left him alone to marvel in his cosy chamber, beside the dimity bed, which she had herself arranged with eloquent touches of welcome. For his part, he was reduced to prostrate awe and admiration by the subtle changes that a few well-filled months had made in the country lass. Mr. Sheridan showed true instinct when he said that in Miss Rowe there was the making of a Lady Teazle. It was possible that, like Lady Teazle, she might be lured for a space into frivolity; but sure her nature was of the sterling kind which induced the famous heroine, after the falling of the screen, to toss off superficial foibles like a worn-out glove. Cy beheld a budding fine lady of fashion, and became exceedingly shy; whereupon his cousin laughed in glee and clapped her hands; and then he recognized his old idolized, tantalizing Abby, who, somehow, became the lady of fashion again when he babbled of his new profession. Could it be that she was the least tiny bit ashamed of him? That were hard, when he laid down his honest heart so gladly as a door-mat for her dainty feet. He felt sure that she evaded his attempt to interest her in the Bristol school, so with reluctance avoided the topic. But my lord was enthusiastic, and offered every encouragement.

In due course he was pitted against the Chatham Caulker, and beat him, and showed such gallantry on the occasion that a stranger presented the neophyte

with notes for fifty pounds. Indeed, he deserved the patronage of amateurs and all the careful instruction of the Champion; for he learnt to love the ring for the skill, finesse, and fortitude displayed by the better sort within the ropes, rather than, as some others did, as a vehicle for airing ruffianism and the practice of brutish violence. Of prepossessing appearance, with diffident and obliging manners, he became milder instead of more ferocious as he progressed in the knowledge of his art—a circumstance due to the guidance of Cribb, whose proverbial gentleness and polish had endeared him to gentleman George.

The Champion of all England, at one time a coal-porter, a thickset and sturdy man of five feet ten, was in private life as placid as a lamb, as fastidious in his way as Brummel. Once he was heard severely rating his laundress for having dared to place his shirts in lavender. Many are the tales told of his forbearance from the use of his fists in civil life. Several times he was compelled to hale fellows before the magistrates who abused him in hopes of getting up a quarrel. He never could be got to fight save in the way of business, with regular forms and ceremonies. Cribb took a fancy to my lord's *protégé* at once, and the latter spent much time with him at the fives-courts, or practising with another pupil called Randal on Hoxton Fields, finding always a welcome at Lord Osmington's whenever his tutor spared him.

Abigel could not get used to this state of things, and resolved to break another lance on the subject with her benefactor. Had he a reason, she inquired, for making such a social gap between the cousins? What was the use of matriculating for a lady, learning cymbals and tambourine like fashionable damsels, practising elaborate *entrechats* and shawl-dances, painting daisies and macaws on velvet, if her own first cousin was to be the associate of ruffians, and yet dwell in the self-same Noah's Ark? As soon as the accomplishments of the *ton* were perfected, she was to be launched into high society. Was it pleasant, did he think, to have the cousin whom she liked so lowered? "Pugilists are worthy fellows," my lord retorted, "petted by Corinthians, patronized by royalty." "That might be as regarded a few, but in the main were they not a bad set, and was not the business of their lives to batter noses of adversaries into pulp?" "If you intend to marry him," my lord sneered, "say so at once, and save me expense on your behalf." No. She certainly had no intention of marrying cousin Cy or anybody else, for that matter, and it was indelicate to suspect her motives. "Go away and don't bother," was the end of the argument. And Abby could not help wondering vaguely if grandaunt's suspicions were justified, and that my lord meant some day to propose himself. And then she chid herself with vehement wrath. Of course he did not,

and if he did she would refuse him point blank. My lord was not a marrying man. In this much he was right; there was no use in bothering. The future would unfold itself quite soon enough. Meanwhile he must arrange things as he fancied, and she would henceforth be indifferent and quiescent. Was he not master for the present of both the cousins' destiny? Protest was vain, save in small things. She would so far give way to withdraw open opposition to Cy's choice of a career; would let him drone about his lofty aims, since it was pleasing to him. But when, one morning, thus encouraged, he entered her drawing-room, awkward and sheepish, though dressed as smart as a new-scraped carrot, and explained that he intended to assume a *nom de guerre*, and had chosen her favourite flower as a cognomen, she felt inclined to box his ears. "On the sward," he said proudly, "I shall be known as 'Sprig of Myrtle.'" The idea of striving to associate her in his triumphs! Well, well, what was to be gained by showing anger? The dear fellow was modest and upright, and neither drank nor swore. It was well to be thankful for that. So far as cousin Cy was concerned, there was nothing for it but to let things slide, and pray for a rosy morrow.

"That's your sort, my rorty covies!" exclaimed Lord Osmington, who could adapt his talk to the shrine of pugilism. "Welcome to the Sluicery.

Mother B., give us a buzz. How's yourself, Thomas? See to the peck and booze for their Royal Highnesses—burnt wine, ham shavings, and steaming arrack punch. Look alive, and see that it's slap-up! Bones and anchovies to follow, of course, with the second bowl."

The Sluicery was the name of a small sanctum behind the bar, with a sanded floor, plain benches along the panelled walls, and running in front of each a heavy table, polished like a mirror. The apartment was dimly lighted with dip candles, but the central fireplace sent forth a glow which illumined the numerous pictures, and glittered on a silver vase over the mantelpiece. The vase bore this inscription, "To Thomas Cribb, from the Sporting World, as a tribute to his valour and integrity;" while the pictures represented celebrated bruisers in paralytic poses from the days of Figg and Broughton, portraits of the most noble amateurs, delineations of the most celebrated encounters. It was a cosy nook, although the seats were hard; and its occupants rose in a body, and pulled their forelocks on the advent of the royal brothers. The princes had chosen their night well, for the flower of the flock were here, smoking long clays and discussing affairs with the gravity of a Vehmgericht. In the first place, there was old Joe Ward, the Nestor of the ring, who up to seventy never missed a fight; and peach-cheeked Randal; and Cy, his fellow-pupil; and one-eyed Belcher, the ex-Champion. These were

habitués; but on this occasion two of the opposition had looked in—the great Mendoza, head and front of the Hebrew school, and Caleb Rann, his favourite disciple.

With the latter we shall have a good deal to do, so let us take a look at him. Tall and dark, with bushy eyebrows and blue-shaven chin, he seemed a determined young person. The exact opposite to Cy in character and tastes, he was a good example of the lawless bruiser whose malpractices brought his calling into disrepute. Indeed, he disliked Mr. Smalley with all his soul; for he took his modest ways for cowardice, and got the notion into his stupid head, where it remained, that Cy was at heart a cur. Such being his conviction, was it not provoking to have the youth cast for ever in his teeth as a pattern, whose manners he should imitate? His own master Mendoza's manners were no great shakes, and yet he obtained support. Why, then, should he, Caleb Rann, fetter himself with social punctilio, which was as irksome as a strait-waistcoat? He could not deny that Cyrus showed professional promise; but he must be lily-livered underneath the crust, or why should he refuse to join in orgies, decline to run amuck in public thoroughfares, beat watchmen, pull bell-handles, like their betters? He took no pleasure in a spree, or in going out for a week on the drink. Was he not, therefore, utterly contemptible, a mean humbug, to

be well thrashed some day, despite the scientific tricks instilled by Mr. Cribb? 'Twas exasperating beyond measure that Cyrus should be patronized by so great a man as the president of the Pugilistic Club, while he, Caleb, was taken up by nobody. What if he should succeed in pummelling Cyrus? Might not such a triumph lead to the ousting of the Sprig of Myrtle and the promotion of the victor to his place in the Osmington Noah's Ark? It was worth trying for, though fortune had hitherto been cruel to Mr. Caleb Rann. Barely five and twenty, he had tried many trades, and failed in all. As a boy, he practised an athletic occupation in the open air, being chiefly employed in escorting barges from Wigan to Liverpool and back. At eighteen, he entered the service of a vintner at York, and was speedily dismissed for drunkenness. Thence he migrated to London, and, failing as a street acrobat, gained a scanty wage by posing as an Academy model, residing meanwhile at Bow. It was no easy matter to wring profit out of his peculiar gifts, which consisted in an immeasurable command of slang, muscles of iron, and a skull of abnormal thickness, and he ultimately came to the conclusion that his best chance was in the ring. But even there he was unlucky. His gammon and obscene language displeased the amateurs; for, having floored his man, he would squat by his side, and, mimicking his pains, cry, "Oh, my eye! didn't you

catch it then ?"—an unprofessional proceeding in the worst taste. On the occasion of his first public exhibition, hostile murmurs were heard ; whereupon, out of bravado, he made a *purr*, running his head into his rival's bread-basket, and shutting him up like a book. Manners are manners : 'twas as bad as shooting a fox. An outraged shriek of execration rose into the air, the ropes were torn down, a free fight ensued. Semi-delirious seconds spat in each other's faces ; women screamed and tugged each other's locks. The place resembled a battle-field. The offending Caleb would have fared badly in the scrimmage, had not a powerful man pulled him into a gig and driven off at a gallop. The unknown rescuer turned out to be Mendoza, who took him home, and strove to polish the rough diamond—a task that would have puzzled Hercules ; for Caleb was as unable to assume the courtesies of civilized life as he was to steer clear of lushing-kens, or avoid the seductions of the gaming-table. He was addicted to gin, was unruly in the matter of training, squandered money when he had it ; when he hadn't, pawned his clothes, and got drunk in bed. On the evening of a successful battle, which had won him a hundred guineas, he spent the entire sum in a single cruise from Westminster to Bow. And yet this singular creature had a twilight perception of honour ; and Mendoza, driven to his wit's end to keep him straight, was obliged to practise upon it. Accompanied

by confederates, he took Rann to Hampstead on the loose, indulged him in every folly, supplied copious flashes of max, challenged him when sufficiently primed to a game of "shaking in the hat." Caleb fell into the snare; lost first his money, then his clothes, and, spurred by taunts, was induced to stake his life. Mendoza won, and calmly ordered his prize to hang himself at the first lamp on their reaching the road across the fields. Rann, though a bully, was no coward; the attribute of the God he worshipped was unflinching personal bravery. He took off his neckerchief, and prepared to obey; but Mendoza, in the presence of witnesses, pretended to change his mind, declaring that a corpse was useless, except to sell to the surgeons, while a living slave was an article of value. He explained, therefore, to attentive Caleb that he was no longer master of himself, but bound, when called upon, to show unreasoning obedience. It was not likely that so ill-regulated a sinner would be reduced by slavery to complete meekness, but the ruse served its turn; for, in moments of emergency, Mendoza had only to recall the debt of honour for his wishes to be punctually obeyed. Types of human character repeat themselves. The ancient barbarians of the North, who pillaged venerable Rome, showed the same romantic fidelity to their rude idea of principle. The Goth, we are told, suffered himself to be bound, chastised, sold into remote slavery

by a weaker victor, who had won him on a dice-throw. With care and patience, Caleb became a fair specimen of the Hebrew style of pugilism—more ferocious than scientific—dealing his blows from the elbow, trusting to unusual suppleness from the waist upward and nimbleness of foot. But he seldom made and never could keep a friend, being sly and foul-mouthed, and truculent in his cups. Once it even became needful to hale him before the Bond Street council, he having boasted that a large sum had been promised by a certain noble lord if he would allow himself to be beaten. He had a way, too, of pretending illness, leaning a heavy head upon a second's shoulder to influence the betting. These misde-meanours affected his credit sadly. All the sympathy was with Cooper, when he was unlucky enough to be slain by Rann, though the milling of the latter was so brilliant as to force unwilling plaudits even from those whom he had cheated. He bewildered the foe with lightning feints; and ere the contest had lasted fifty seconds, planted his right close to Cooper's ear, and pressed the carotid so severely that it ceased to supply the heart. For this mishap he was tried at the Old Bailey; but so fond were Englishmen of the ring as an institution, that he got off with a month's imprisonment, and for that time, at least, escaped the proverbial sheriff's breakfast—a hearty choke and a caper. The young man was unpopular with amateurs,

but the Hebrew clique declared it was wrong of noble patrons to throw cold water on his skill. In Caleb was the stuff which goes to the making of heroes, and it was ridiculous to assert that the fact of his being drunken and unpolished made a difference in his standing as a boxer. Mendoza was anxious that his disciple should have a fair chance, so he brought him down to the Sluicery, and proposed that a match should be arranged between him and a pupil of the Champion's.

Cribb disapproved of the candidate, and so did Belcher. When the royal brothers entered, Cribb was delivering an oration, with many hums and haws and pipe-waves, wherein he upbraided Mendoza for his partisanship. "It is such men as this," he said, with withering scorn, "who cast a shadow on the noble art and cause a certain set of magistrates to talk of putting it down. Look at my dear pal Jem," he pursued, elegantly waving his calumet in the direction of Belcher, who blushed like a girl. "He ought to have a statty; for he's a type of types, though he has a game optic. Bashful, conciliatory, generous, he never made an enemy by imperance. His soul's as clean as that silver vase and as bright; and it was the proudest moment of my life when I won the belt from him, and he gave me his hand in friendship. I humbly strive to copy his virtues, and point him out to all my pupils as the best of men, the best of

scientific pugilists, the best of good fellows ; and I'm glad to know that others take pattern by Jem, and follow his splendid example." Here he nodded at Cy Smalley, who sat by the fire, and who laughed outright to see the enraged grimace of Caleb, who was glaring with fierce eyes.

"What is it all about?" inquired the Heir-Apparent, so soon as, greetings over, the company were settled in their seats. "Was the Champion delivering a sermon?"

"A bit of a plan, sir," explained Mendoza, "that'll benefit this chap of mine without hurting Cribb. You see, the Pink of Bow (that's Caleb's fighting name) is under a cloud, and like to be squashed by it, which is unjust. The swells don't hold with him; but he'll do me credit yet. I would not be so rude as to say a word contrariwise to the Bristollites" (this with a bow to Cribb and Belcher); "but I'll back my lot against theirs any day for a quart of daffy, though their bantam has taken the taste of the amateurs. If your Royal Highness would give your countenance, 'twould be a real kindness; for Cribb's set his face somehow against a meeting 'twixt his Sprig of Myrtle and my Pink of Bow, and I do want to bring it on."

"The Pink's stronger, older, and more experienced," objected Cribb.

"Agile as a monkey," added Belcher.

“Pooh!” coaxed the Hebrew. “The Sprig don’t want advantages any more nor a dog wants a side pocket. Come! Caleb shall wear thick, hobnailed boots. That’s straight, surelie!”

“’Tis for you to decide, Cribb,” asserted Lord Osmington, who in his quality of host presided at the punch-bowl. “Speak up, my king of beef-headed Britons.”

“Don’t like it. What do you say?” asked the Champion, doubtfully.

“All the same to me,” responded Cyrus.

“Do you really believe in him, Mendoza?” asked the Duke of York. “Your faction wants young blood terribly.”

“S’help me, I do!” returned the Hebrew. “He’s the gamest I’ve come across this many a day.”

“Then I’m with you,” the Duke bawled; “for the honour of the Jews, though I can’t screw a mag out of any of ’em.”

“And I with you, Cribb, of course,” said the Prince of Wales.

“Dash, dash!” shouted Lord Osmington, with a string of expletives, “I’ll see the boy through it, since he belongs to me. At Moulsey, this day two months.”

“Here’s an idea,” suggested Sheridan, making a violent effort to be gay. “Try ’em now in a preliminary canter. A love-fight, or, say, for a gallon of max?”

"Bravo, Sherry, my pippin!" shouted Vere, quite in his element now. "Ten pounds against a bender on the Sprig. Finish the bowl, gents; no shirking. Mother B. will brew another while the bantams spar. Here's a sentiment, 'England's rose, and the sun that shines on it.'"

All drank the toast upstanding, with an inclination towards the Prince of Wales, while Mother Butler nodded pleasantly over her stewpans, and the young ones prepared for battle.

"That chap's a bad 'un," grumbled Vere, who watched the ferocious exultation of the Pink as he removed his shirt. "Like a bell he'll come to be hanged. Remember, lads, that it's only a bit of fun. No losing of tempers, mind. That's well, Cy; cool and quiet does it. I'll pick you up, if Jem will attend to the Pink. You, Cribb, to be referee."

"No, no," objected Brinsley, who could not be accused of shirking his punch. "As there are no ropes, 'tis our place to form a ring. Let's have it shipshape. Come, mother, lend your arms."

Thus, in the small hours, by the feeble glimmer of cheap dips, on a sanded floor, within a ring formed by the stretched arms of two princes of the blood, a peer of the realm, a statesman, an ex-coal-porter and ex-butcher, and fat Dame Quickly, did the two heroes first try each other's mettle, who, six years later on—— But we must not look ahead.

Caleb, who was half-seas over, rushed forward like a frantic windmill ; but Cy showed him the preventers, and sent him flying against the Duke of York like a pellet from a popgun.

“Steady there !” bawled the Hebrew. “Damn him ! always lushy.”

“Steady it isn’t,” panted his Grace. “He’s knocked all the wind out of me !”

“Good ! Much better !” continued the anxious Jew. “By the beard of Moses, magnificent ! By Aaron, like a watch—tick-tack ! Did you see, your Highness ? Look how he’s marked him from liver to ear with his right mawley. I taught him that. Ah ! there goes the Sprig to grass, with his teeth upwards !”

Cyrus did nothing of the sort ; and indignant Nestor Ward, growing excited, threw out sarcastic allusions to pigs and pork, the Queen of Sheba, and the amours of David the king, to which the Jew retorted in high dudgeon, with a cataract of ingenious oaths. Far from being floored, Cy distinguished himself by admirable coolness and judgment, which drew forth the ferocity of Rann. “Don’t be shy, milksop !” he jeered. “The devil wipes his tail with a poor man’s pride, so don’t be too fine to hit out, if you know how !”

Cyrus did hit out ; lightly, as befitted the occasion, and swiftly, too. But he acted for the most part on

the defensive; while his patron shrieked wild bets, which there were none to take. This voracious chronicler cannot say how long the contest might have lasted—the supper might have been cooked to cinders—but for a timely interruption. Jem Belcher was roaring with stentorian lungs, “Go it, Sprig! Bravo, bravo!” when a loud hammering sounded from without, and a shrill voice breathed threats of vengeance. The ex-Champion of England, the pattern fistic athlete, no sooner caught its dulcet tone, than he turned deadly pale and implored the floor to swallow him. And well he might; for ’twas his Bunch of Rue, the only being upon earth of whom he stood in awe—a raw-boned female, who, when exasperated by gin to the required pitch of frenzied jealousy, would sally forth after her absent lord, and, lying in wait, batter his unresisting head with frying-pan or rolling-pin.

“Oh, mercy!” he said, as, dropping the Pink, for whom he officiated as bottle-holder, he made for the casement. Once or twice he had escaped by means of cunning fables—had been taken by a pressgang, seized by a bum-bailiff; but she had found him out, and was the more jealous, calling him a gay deceiver. “Quick! How does it open?” he whispered, in agitated haste.

“Who is it?” asked Sheridan.

“My good lady!” groaned the pugilist, struggling with a rusty hasp.

“ Oh, Lord ! ” cried both the princes in sympathetic chorus.

Forcing the lattice, the ex-Champion fled, hotly pursued by the Bunch of Rue, whose horrid imprecations faded away in the dark cave of sullen night. A chill fell on the party, for the appalling *contretemps* kindled dread reminiscences in the bosoms of the prodigals. It was some time before they rallied and could discuss with equanimity a majestic steaming mess of tripe and onions. But there is always a subtle satisfaction to be derived from another's grief, however much we may ourselves have suffered. So, by the time two more punch-bowls had been discussed, Mother Butler was called on to warble a ditty, after which the Prince of Wales obliged—he could sing a very good song ; and then, all joining in the kiddy-catch, “ Begone, dull care ! ” Lord Osmington's friends became sociable, and prepared to make a night of it.

CHAPTER VI.

KENSINGTON.


IN course of time the Dreadful Woman *par excellence* (not Mary Anne Clarke, nor Madam Belcher), by dint of unwearied screeching, worried herself out of banishment. She quitted Blackheath, scene of so much unwisdom, and was installed in Kensington Palace, where she gave orgies to shady associates. But this concession on the part of the royal family was far from satisfying one who was nothing if not a martyr. The Queen steadily declined to receive her Royal Highness. Her only daughter had been torn some time since from the arms of an agonized and devoted mamma, whose heart-strings were rent in twain. This, at least, was the picturesque light in which Caroline chose to put the matter; though even King George, who helped her as much as he dared, was compelled to admit that the *ménage* of the Princess of Wales was no fitting place for a child. Shortly after the investigation, whose impotent conclusion so vexed the Prince, the heiress to the crown of England was

removed from the care of her mother and installed in a bower in Windsor Park, there to be educated under the judicious care of his gracious Majesty himself. That he did not shine as a tutor was sufficiently proved by the conduct of his sons, and his efforts as chief governess to a young lady were hardly more successful. The Princess Charlotte, treated as though of the male sex, grew up a tom-boy, and picked up ideas in intercourse with her lively uncles which were certainly not strait-laced. One of the jocund youths had not blushed to introduce a *chère amie* into the presence of his niece. The Queen, who was for ever skirmishing with her irrepressible granddaughter—the two were natural enemies—was scandalized, and lifted up her hands in horror, when the fledgeling observed, with careless *aplomb*, “What does it matter? The dukes can’t marry whom they like, and they must love somebody, you know.” Her preceptresses were changed from time to time, but were of little real service; for their charge was of stronger character than they, and scoffed at their tiresome tirades. As years went on, and she bloomed into a tall and handsome girl, her position became more and more difficult; for she stood half-way betwixt a pair who were antagonistic, and if she bent ever so little towards one was sure to be blamed by the other. She saw her papa but rarely, for fledgeling maidens were not in his line; but was permitted to visit her mamma each

Saturday, on which occasions the Comus crew were supposed to be banished, lest they should sully her innocence. No doubt it is a severe measure to separate a mother altogether from her child; yet it would have been prudent, perhaps, to have adopted an extreme course in the case of the Princess Caroline. Such influence as she had over her daughter was all for evil. She was constantly encouraging a girl, who was already too precocious, to distrust her father and be tenacious of her rights, whereby she was counselling rebellion and a revolt from wholesome bondage. The stern little Queen, on the other hand, perceiving the peril, strove to bridle the damsel, and bit her with a curb; and so, a prey to faction, born to worry and anxiety, used as a stick to belabour others withal, she passed through a tempestuous childhood, in which she was never young.

As her husband hoped and prayed, the Princess of Wales was daily losing ground with all, except the mob. Grain by grain she was dropping self-respect, sinking into the sea from which there was no rescue. Although a contingent of respectable people still clung to the labouring bark for pity's sake, they knew that it was rudderless. Caroline had no intellectual pursuits, was devoured by a mania for intrigue, and fond of doing outrageous things because they were extraordinary. As friends of rank fell off, she filled their places with others of a lower kind, who picked

her pocket while they fawned, and played into the hands of her foes by damaging her reputation. Despite his errors, the Prince, her spouse, was beloved by those about him; the Princess never, for she bored her guests to weariness, and disgusted them by petty back-biting and wishing people dead. Her parties were of a curious description. We will look in upon a Saturday evening, in the year of grace 1811, when the Princess Charlotte is expected to arrive with my lady Clifford to pay her weekly visit. There is a roaring fire, though the thermometer is at eighty, and on it pots and pans are simmering, filled with bubbling cosmetics. The apartment, if shabby and unswept, is comfortable enough, bedizened with an incongruous mixture of valuable finery and trash. Here is a fly-catcher in paper, there an antique ornament. On a shelf are some caskets of jasper and onyx; by their side a cottage made of shells and a box of Tunbridge ware. In one corner is a piano, upon which Signor Sapio is strumming an accompaniment to the squalling of his wife; while their son, a handsome young Italian, sprawls, like a lazzaroni, on the floor, clasping the hand of his hostess. She is splendidly attired in white crape, with a silver drapery falling all over her person, while her rough hair is dyed of the brightest brown, her cheeks and lips of the most vivid crimson. In a second corner, the old Duchess of Brunswick, her mother—between the two there is no love lost



—is snoring, as if about to have a fit; for these symposia drag their length along during an interminable period, and the atmosphere might be cut with a knife. Not far away, masked by a screen, Lord Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb are cooing like turtle-doves, too much devoted to heed the hubbub. Sir William Gell is there, a loose and gay amateur antiquary, who tries with all his might to keep his eyes open; and Monk Lewis, clever but disreputable penman; and Pucitti, and Tramezani and his wife, singers of a second class from the Opera and Vauxhall, who are present on a familiar footing. At the head of the table sits Captain Manby, a battered-visaged sea-dog, for whom the Princess took a fancy last time she was at Ramsgate, and whom she installed as master of the revels and first favourite for the nonce in her impulsive, tactless way. Bony Ambrosia Cotton and Leoline complete the coterie, though others are expected later; for Caroline ignores the conditions on which she may see her child, declining to be parted from the Comus crew even for a single evening. To enter the room is like tumbling into a kettle of broiling sprats; the nose is affected by an unseemly mixing of odours, and the ears are assailed by an uproar as of cats upon the tiles, while the younger Sapio murmurs tender things, and his parents squeak their loudest.

Captain Manby is disturbed in his mind, for the

Princess Charlotte's carriage is heard upon the gravel, and the gallant salt, forgetting that it was Saturday, has come to dinner *sans façon* in his muddy boots.

"No matter," cries his hostess, hoarsely. "De child will take her dinner in de oder room, and come in to us afterwards; and if you keep your legs under de tablecloth, she won't see you are not in stockings. Leoline, my pet, go look to de Princess, and see she is provided. Sapio, my dear, get Tramezani to de instrument. Your mudder creaks like a door-hinge."

Leoline obeyed orders with alacrity, for although he had been four years by this time in the service of her Highness, he never could conquer a feeling of despondency whilst witnessing the royal saturnalia. The little lad, who at twelve had prated so proudly of his ancestress Anne Plantagenet, was basking in princely rays; but they were not as pregnant with good as ardent poetic fancy pictured, and, exhausted sometimes by late hours and stifled with foul air and fetid scents, he caught himself wondering now and again whether the diadem was really tinsel—if true happiness lay in obscurity. Happiness! Who is really happy? No. He began at nineteen, seeing what he saw, to suspect the impossibility of earthly good or happiness, and to indulge in speculations as to the hut where dwelt Content. Caroline was kind, and he liked his mistress, whilst deploring her undisciplined conduct; but the spell which prevented any

one from *loving* her worked upon him as upon others. At first, in the belief that he might be made a means of annoying her consort's dearest friend, she made much of her new toy, clad him in sumptuous raiment, combed his golden hair, and drank his health as "the earl." But this too innocent excitement palled on her very soon. Though she kept him in her service and treated him with familiarity, she found young Sapio, the Italian music-master, who had limpid eyes but no pedigree, more fascinating, and was apt to cry out with impatience and cut Leo short if he hinted of his mammy's marriage lines and the chance of claiming his own. In truth, a marriage certificate was naught but a symbol of trouble to her Royal Highness. Those with whom she elected now to live made light of such paltry rubbish. She was so odd a combination, that none could quite make up their minds as to whether they liked or loathed her. At one time she displayed the lazy, good-tempered awkwardness of the hippopotamus, combined with the coarse heartiness of a Dutch *vrouw*; at another she could be so phlegmatic as to revolt the companion of the moment. When a young postillion fell off the leader of her team one night and had his legs crushed by the carriage-wheel, she showed no emotion whatever, grumbling only at the delay that would make her late for a party. So was it with her only daughter. As we shall see, she spurned that child's affection at

a supreme moment, and, after shocking all the world, disgusted even Charlotte.

At nineteen, Leoline was slim and well-made, if slight—a pretty fellow, with the real *bel air*. His complexion of milk and roses spoke of constitutional delicacy; but no one could help admiring his fine deportment, his deep blue eyes, and aureole of well-brushed gold, any more than they could his aspect of dreamy pensiveness, of gazing far away into a better and brighter sphere. To him the planet on which he crawled left much to be desired, and, young as he was, bleak waves of disappointment swept now and again over his soul, and nipped the tendrils of hope. It was all very well to endeavour to console himself by reflecting that man is a creature of circumstance, warmed into life and action by the currents into which he is cast. What if the currents are frozen and decline to thaw? His ocean, bitter cold at first, had warmed a little; but then it had been chilled again, and numbed his sensitive nature. Would his aspirations ever be realized? It did not look like it. Sure 'twould be wise to renounce shadowy ambition, worldly longings that might not be gratified. The poetic lamp was alight within—Monk Lewis told him so—and Lord Byron showed signs of incipient jealousy. Would it not be best to devote his energies to wooing the Muses in serious earnest, and, resigning cloudy pretensions to an earthly coronet, win by talent and

perseverance a wreath of undying bays? Then the spirit of disquiet jogged him with his elbow and whispered, "Why not wear both, like my lord Byron? Fortune is a fickle nymph who loves the brave, and the future is unknown. Hope on, hope ever. Cling to her skirt, twine arms about her waist, refusing to let her go, and by-and-by she will hearken to your suit." The young man had reason enough for not being satisfied with his position, for it was anomalous. A page he was—half servant and half lowly friend; Earl of Northallerton, recognized lord of many acres, he never could be except by miracle. The case was so desperate, and Caroline grew so indifferent about his chances, that he would have come in time to give them calmly up, contemplating vanished futile dreams with half-sad amusement; have come quite cheerfully to don the harness of literary fame, starting from the lower level of ordinary men. But, unluckily, the Princess Charlotte meddled with his peace of mind, and nourished fading illusions with her prattle. The strange, half-developed details of his story stirred her girlish romance, and she constantly exhorted him to be of good cheer, for when she was Queen of England she would see that he had his own. Now, if Caroline was a broken reed, Charlotte was to all appearances steady of purpose, old beyond her years, and Leoline felt justified in pinning faith to her. But she was too young to perceive the absurdity of building houses for

the nascent poet on the sand. She quite believed what she said, and thought she was doing a kindness by encouraging the yearnings of the nameless one; forgetting that King George, if weak in the upper story, had a constitution of iron, and that it had not dawned on her papa yet that he was other than a boy. Life seems so long to persons in their teens; and what, pray, is the legitimate employment of adolescence if not castle-building? Charlotte fully intended to do wondrous things as soon as she was queen, not choosing to consider the time which might elapse between the year of grace 1811 and the date of her coronation; forgetting that hope too long deferred breaketh the human heart. She liked Leoline, for he was the only person with whom she could converse on the weekly visits to mamma. The Comus crew were afraid, and shrank from her, and she repaid their aversion with interest. He was drawn to her because, independent of her position of Princess, she was a sweet girl, who shone like a transient beam into the sty in which it was his lot to vegetate. Besides, they had a bond of union, a common topic of engrossing interest of which they never tired. Are you surprised to hear that this pleasant subject for discussion was no other than Miss Abigel Rowe?

This is how it was. Masters and professors having accomplished their delightful task, the finished and complete Miss Rowe came out in London society under

the chaperonage of my lord Osmington, and was so well received that her benefactor was delighted with his work. Brummel, who had watched her progress, was good enough to give his countenance; Alvanley swore that Euphrosyne was the most charming of *débutantes*; the Prince of Wales said she was pretty. What more was needed to secure a triumph? My lady Castlereagh, glad to oblige the Heir-Apparent's crony, introduced the complete and finished young person of fashion at Almack's, where the piquancy of her unusual style and fearless ways produced sensation. What a funny little witch it was, with *petite* but perfect figure, gipsy eyes, *nez retroussé*, and short, crisp black curls! Who on earth could she be? My lord's natural daughter, some wiseacres whispered; while others suggested that he intended to crown his eccentric career by marrying an adopted foundling. A few muttered that her mother was an Italian or a Spaniard, which particular foreigner it was difficult to say, considering the constant change that went on in the Noah's Ark. However, that concerned nobody, since Brummel and Lady Castlereagh approved. By-and-by she would be my lady Osmington, or at least an heiress, if my lord did not mean to marry. Sufficient for the present that she was a nut-brown fay, gifted with amazing assurance. With what *sang froid* did she perform her *entrechats* on the first trying night at Almack's, an ordeal of which many a

débutante had almost died ! Without the smallest hesitation she stood up on the sacred floor, and, to please the Prince of Wales, executed a shawl-dance ; and then, actually tapping Brummel's arm, ordered him to fetch a glass of lemonade, and sat down as if nothing had happened. There was no earthquake. "*Elle ira loin,*" said Esterhazy ; and in sooth she was an astonishing young woman, not bold, but self-possessed. Alvanley's nickname of Euphrosyne clung to her henceforth, for, indeed, she seemed the goddess of mirth, laughter, and glee incarnate. Lord Osmington having made no advances, and not showing signs of making any, she was able to conclude with relief that he had no intention of proposing. She had accepted the inevitable with regard to cousin Cyrus. Every one was as kind as possible. Brummel even went so far as to pronounce her manners "pretty well." Why, then, with a fleckless sky, should she not be joyous ? The particular object of her naïve worship was the Prince of Wales. The open-mouthed awe with which the rural maid had surveyed the royal Antinous at Battle Magna was developing into affectionate veneration. Sure no man ever had so fine a leg, so grand a figure (the obtrusive rotundity was shuttered in with stays), so sweet and bewitching a smile ; and he who was never deaf to hymns from feminine lips was obliging enough to flirt. Quite in arcadian fashion, though, for there was that about

her which forbade the taking of liberties. Even the other *débutantes*, whom she snuffed out with her glory, admitted that their rival's character was as pure as the dawn at sunrise, that she was refreshingly downright, as unshackled by small prejudice as the wind. It not unnaturally occurred to his Royal Highness that turbulent Charlotte, who was growing distressingly big, would want a female friend, and that she could not have a better one than a girl who was a trifle older than herself, who never would become a pander —last, not least, who adored her papa, and would teach his daughter to do likewise. And so it came about that the Princess and Lord Osmington's *protégée* were brought together, and took to each other at once. Charlotte appreciated the strong, fearless independence of Abigel; while the latter perceived and pitied the difficult position of her new friend, and saw the sterling worth that underlay her asperity. When Charlotte was allowed to go to town, she always lunched at Osmington House; while, as for Abigel, she was constantly at Windsor, breathing whiffs of the country. Of course Leoline saw little of his play-fellow, attached as he was by whimsical fate to the opposition camp; but Charlotte was delighted to act as a go-between, and relate to each the thoughts and aspirations of the other. The Princess was fifteen now, but looked twenty, for her figure was already formed. Although by no means graceful, she was

distinguée. Unusually tall and broad-shouldered, there was a *souppçon* of clumsiness about her voluptuous shape, which suggested that she would soon grow stout; her face would have been beautiful, but that it seemed flat and sadly wanted shade. She had a quantity of fine flaxen hair, but, as is often the case with blondes, the eyebrows were of the same colour as the skin, and the lashes nearly white. In dress, she showed a cultivated taste. As she stood talking fretfully to Leoline, who had just warned her of the presence of the crew, she wore over a muslin skirt a tunic of pale-blue satin, trimmed with point and gold embroidery, a blue velvet hat and sweeping feather, with an aigrette of sapphires and diamonds.

Her Royal Highness was in a tantrum, and gave ill-temper vent. "It's too bad, and I won't stand it," she roundly declared, "and you may go and tell my mother so. How often has she been warned not to make me meet low people? And yet, from the noise, she must have searched Whitechapel. I shall be mewed up closer than ever; forbidden to come at all; be permitted to see no one but grandmamma's horrid tabbies. When ill-bred adventurers take too much wine, they are dangerous. Lady de Clifford, stop my coach! We will go home again."

Leoline implored the outraged damsel to be patient. If she came no more, how much the emptier would be his life! Would she not consent to take her dinner

in the drawing-room alone, while he carried her protests to mamma? Nobody had taken too much wine, or ever got drunk in that house, till the advent of whiskey punch; for was it not notorious that the strongest stomachs succumbed before the vintages of Caroline? If she could only coax the Prince of Wales to taste her wine, she would be amply revenged for a catalogue of wrongs, however voluminous. Until the moment for ardent spirits supervened, Byron, Gell, and Lewis invariably drank water. Therefore there was nothing to fear. The crew, when the damsel came among them, always shrank into abject nothingness, and sought obscurity like spiders. For the present, the motley gathering was somnolent and dull, occupied by the process of digestion. What Leoline said was no doubt true; so the young lady resolved to wait, and the page went off to arrange the difficulty, and remonstrate with his hardened mistress. Caroline growled that her child was abominably prim, servile to papa and granny; but that it was her business to counteract all that. Ordering the lazzaroni to rise from the carpet and behave himself, she announced that she would take a walk. For reasons, the intrepid sea-dog could not stir from the shelter of the tablecloth. The Sapios and singers from Vauxhall dreaded the illustrious virgin's sneers. When she entered the room, there was a general scuffle as each withdrew from notice—all but the blushing sailor, who retained

his place at the table with deprecating and ungainly salutes.

"Kiss me, my angel," Caroline exclaimed with protruded lips. "I wonder you are let come at all to one who is persecuted. How is the fat brute?"

Charlotte frowned. "How many times have I asked you not to talk of my father before strangers?"

"Pooh! All de world knows and shall know more," retorted Caroline, turning to the company. "Monsieur Percival is writing a *brochure* about me to vex Mrs. Fitzherbert's husband. De public shall read it, and shall see de lies he told—de baddest man Heaven did ever born!"

"Are you sure, madam, that Mr. Percival is not working for himself at your expense," asked Monk Lewis—"trying to force Government to stop his mouth? There have been so many surprising disclosures lately, that a few more might overturn the throne."

"What care I!" snorted Caroline, with a shrug. "Did I not come to England to be told by Lady Jersey that I was not a wife?"

"Oh, mother!" murmured miserable Charlotte.

"I fail to see," pursued Mr. Lewis, "how the publishing of damaging charges against yourself can do you any good."

"It will vex *him*," returned the Princess of Wales, "and de Queen, who is so *hautaine*. His Majesty

was good to me, I own; but now he is ill. 'I will befriend you,' de good King said, 'though my family will be my death.' And he is so ill, so ill, and I've no powerful friend at all but Monsieur Percival and Whitbread. De Queen shall receive me at a Drawing-room before *tout le monde*, or I will publish. De crown dey will not have me wear. A fig for de crown! I will publish, and make dem jump. Allons. We will walk."

The Princess Charlotte bit her lip with annoyance, and darted a look of reproach at Leoline; for the Comus crew, amused by the situation, emerged from the dark and grinned. Whenever she came to Kensington, there was sure to be a scene. Would she be driven, admitting papa to be right, to shun mamma's society of her own accord? What plausible excuse to make? Her mother was her mother, after all. The Queen was full of searching questions after these weekly visits, and there was so little good to tell. What would the public think, who persisted in believing the discarded wife to be a martyr and a paragon? 'Twould be true, but indecorous, to explain that mamma was no better than she should be. Only the other day the chaise was stopped by a countryman, who said, "Bless your winsome face! Never desert your mother." Was it permissible to hope that, when the young heiress to the throne should assume her lofty place in the world, she might

also by devoted patience gain ascendancy over a misguided mamma? Such a result would be to mutual advantage. What a noble task! How high a labour of love, but how arduous a one for a young girl to accomplish single-handed against overwhelming odds! Each time she came to Kensington, Charlotte argued thus within herself, and, after a struggle with pride and shame, arrived at the same resolve. For her erring mother's sake, she must bear and wait and hearken to as little evil as might be; but it was irksome to so haughty a nature to be obliged to wrangle before these low people, and to be compelled to listen to things, too plainly put, which no daughter should hear from a parent.

The princesses passed through the private wicket into Kensington Gardens, and strolled among the populace. Caroline, because she knew it was not becoming, was fond of such excursions, especially after the gloaming, when she could chatter to people without much fear of being recognized. But more amusing far were wanderings further afield—to the nursery gardens about Paddington, where comical adventures might be sought among the yokels, questions asked as to what they thought of the Princess of Wales, spicy anecdotes related of the fat brute's delinquencies. When Charlotte was of the party, she dared not go these lengths, and was sure to be cross in consequence; for 'tis chafing to stand in awe of a

mere chit, whose infantine brow is wrinkled into frowns.

Mother and child walked side by side, followed by Leoline and the two ladies-in-waiting. The rest of the party preferred staying within doors.

"I hate that stuck-up Lady de Clifford!" began Caroline. "A great girl like you should have done with governesses."

"I'm kept as close as a nun," agreed Charlotte, promptly; for this was a mine for the harassing of the foe at which mamma had long been working. "But in three years I shall be of age, and then I'll do as I please."

"As likely now as then," laughed Caroline. "Your boy papa will keep you in de nursery, and de Queen too. *Quelle idée!* Pap and children's frocks as long as possible, and no establishment until you are forty!"

"By law, at eighteen I am of age," cried dignified Charlotte; "and I'm sick and tired of leading-strings. They treat me like a baby. Even Abigel Rowe says it is a shame, who won't admit that the Prince of Wales can be mistaken."

"He wants perpetual youth; no tell-tale grown-up girls."

"It's granny's doing as much as his. She's a horrid, horrid old cat!"

"Mit claws, my child, dat scratch. Abigel Rowe

You see too much of her who loves my *monstre* and is protected by his bosom friend."

"No one is more genuine and true than Abigel," Charlotte answered stiffly. "Ask Leoline."

"Her protector is one of my greatest enemies, like his bosom friend; so, if you loved me, you would hate her. Is it not so, Ambrosia? My lord quite lives at Carlton House."

"Fie, madam!" cried Madam Cotton, bridling. "Thank goodness, we've seen but few lords of late, and I vow that those who dawdle about Carlton House are their own enemies. I would prefer the open abuse of such a set to their friendship. Nowadays you knock at an ancestral castle and find—what? Emptiness. Ask for my lord duke; he's never there. What's his appearance? Effeminate disease. His habits? Relaxed luxury. His situation? Titled beggary or polished fraud. His Grace, with a thousand quarterings, is a shattered wreck of dissipation, a slave of Jews, a forgotten benefactor of ungrateful sycophants. That is the type, madam. My lord Osmington is like that, and so are the rest. I would not grieve, if I were you, because they plot behind your back."

"The picture's but too faithful," chimed in Lady de Clifford. "When my lord Osmington's time comes, he'll go to a warm place."

"If you all detest him so much," Charlotte observed, "why not bestir yourselves for Leoline? His looks

bespeak the true Northallerton. It would be a glorious way to be quits with your enemy. Trace Leo's lineage."

"Ah! *Le pauvre enfant!*" exclaimed the Princess, impatiently; while her page held his breath. "And de trouble, *ma chère*, and de cost? I've thought of it, but it is too troublesome. It would cost dear, and I have no money for so large expense."

Leoline sighed and clasped his hands together. Was it, indeed, quite hopeless, then? Did he care more about it than he pretended, or why should his theart thump so? Decidedly it was never to be. He must realize that once and for ever, and crush the remnants of the folly out. Had he not assured his zealous advocate many and many a time, draping himself in a corner of humility's tattered robe, that he was quite reconciled to a lowly lot; that all his soul panted for—if anything might be done—was to escape from turmoil, to be allowed to retire into solitude, there to create a world of elfin fancies? But this was as unattainable as the abandoned wish. He was doomed to drag out existence in the kettle of sprats, whose atmosphere was inimical to poesy. Was it for this he had been rescued from the blacksmith? Caroline gave bread and meat and clothes; no more was to be expected now. The horizon of Leo was dark; he had cause, he thought, for shrinking discontent. If only they would leave him undiscussed,

at least, and let him grow used to looking forward to nothing. But no; Charlotte was always harping on this string, playing on his quivering nerves, while she supposed she did him service.

“No money!” she echoed hotly. “Better to spend it on him than be fleeced by fortune-hunters. Those ugly, odious Sapios will bleed you to the last drop.”

Two red spots showed through the rouge on the Princess's cheeks. Mother and child were, as usual, about to quarrel; and when they did, the elder lady was apt to grow loud and shrewish. Such exciting pastime, well enough at home, was ill-suited to a public promenade. Leoline was recalled from unpleasant meditation by the necessity of resuming an unpleasant but familiar *rôle*, and proceeded to pour oil upon the waters.

“I have no desire,” he hastened to say, “that my kind mistress should waste her money over that which may not be bought. Moreover, if Madam Ambrosia is right in her description, better to leave coronets alone. Do not let a humble, faithful servant be a cause of discord between your Royal Highnesses. But, as the matter pains me yet—I cannot help it—pray, oh, pray let the subject be dropped for ever.”

This sensible speech recalled Charlotte to herself, and she smiled on the speaker, as she repeated inwardly that his future must be her care. The reproof was merited, she acknowledged; for she was

not here to indulge in a passage-of-arms in Kensington Gardens. Alas ! what was she come for ? The visit was turning out disagreeably, as her visits always did ; so it would be prudent to cut it short. But she would not abandon Leo's cause, for all his protestations. The wicked usurper, Lord Osmington, should be ousted, or her name was not Charlotte. What did he mean by professing to prefer obscurity ? How spiritless to give way before a little difficulty ! her untried ardour whispered. Sure opposition should brace our nerves for the combat, since it is one of the numberless mundane paradoxes that, though warfare is condemned as improper, yet we were made to fight. Do not tiny lads fall a-pummelling with tiny fists before they are breeched in obedience to a natural law ? But holy John went about exhorting " little children to love one another." Is it an outcome of the principle that what is nice must needs be naughty that instincts, as such, are to be subdued ? John, perhaps, was himself a quarrelsome little boy once, and banged his little brothers. He was old when he preached his sermon—had reached the time when it comes home to most of us that there is little here below that is worth a combat. Does there not come a moment when we survey the past and marvel at our fruitless, unnecessary energy ? Why did we struggle after vain gauds that were not worth the winning ? " All is vanity ! " cried Solomon. Instead

of wasting precious tissue, how much less foolish to accept and make the best of things, chewing the cud of the little good that is attainable. Bees are the Solomons of the insect world. If a great stupid moth crawls into a hive, do the entomological sages move heaven and earth and crack their sinews to eject the obstacle? No. To them the moving of so vast a body would mean weeks and weeks of labour. They kill the intruder with their stings; then, embalming him with wax, transform his corse into a species of ornamental monument. I dare say they use it as a lounge, after the day's work is done. Perhaps queen bee mounts the obstruction as a throne, and from the towering point of vantage, like a Boadicea, harangues her armies. They cover up the obtrusive lumber, and accept its presence with unruffled submission. Charlotte, the chit, was not a philosopher; was a fidget, like Martha, instead of, like sister Mary, remaining peaceful. She could not see that Leoline, perhaps, was choosing the better part by accepting what seemed the inevitable without the breaking of a lance. Her penchant was for war, for her nerves were strong and spirits buoyant; but it would never do to enter the lists with mamma, whose disposition was also combative. So she marched through the palace with pinched lips, and got into the lumbering coach, and drove away with Lady de Clifford, a lonely, melancholy mortal, with an aching heart; and when

she was fairly gone, the Comus crew indulged in a delirious *fandango*. The sound of wheels on the gravel caused no consternation now. The sea-dog could show his boots—put them on the table if he liked. The Sapios could cringe about their hostess, and paddle with her hand, and whisper that there was rent to pay which really could not be met. The handsome lazzaroni could prostrate himself again, and swear in execrable French that the divinity, at whose feet he sprawled, was the perfection of half-dressed loveliness. Tramezani could wheedle and flatter, while cynical Gell and wicked Monk Lewis laughed in their sleeves; for aggressive innocence had rolled away, and the old Duchess of Brunswick, waking from a nap, was calling in discordant tones for her supper of potted lampreys. Punch came in, and decorum departed. Was it wonderful that Leoline should have groaned in spirit, groping darkly for content?

CHAPTER VII.

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

You have had a glimpse of the working of the bad fairy's present number one, yclept Imprudence; to find the results of the other, Procrastination, we must take a survey of affairs.

The political barometer, at the period which occupies us, remained with obstinate steadiness at "stormy," for the unvarnished acrimony which marked social intercourse was a hundredfold more bitter within the walls of Lords and Commons. From the accession of George III. to the death of Mr. Pitt, the Tories carried all before them. Lord North upheld Toryism for ten, Pitt for twenty years: the one against Burke, Fox, and the disasters incident to the American war; the other against Fox, Grey, and the failures which distinguished the struggle against France. It was unfortunate that while difficulties abroad and at home were growing daily, the light of parliamentary glory should be flickering in the socket.

Pitt died of Austerlitz, and Toryism was so weakened

by his death that there seemed nothing for it but to try the Opposition, whose nominal chief—following the traditions of the Brunswick family—was, of course, the Prince of Wales. The King detested Fox, partly on account of the wildness of his private life; but, driven into a corner by events, he consented at last to the formation of a comprehensive and broad-bottomed coalition, which became satirically known by the title of “All the Talents.” In its ranks were to be found such jarring elements as Fox, Moira, Grey, Grenville, Sheridan—the last, despite his unbusiness-like habits, obtaining the minor post of Treasurer to the Navy. So extraordinary an agglomeration of discordant particles soon became universally unpopular.

Affairs abroad were hard enough to manage, but there was a cause of difference at home with which “All the Talents” were quite unfit to cope. Religious squabbles have in all ages proved more destructive of peace and good-will than any other source of earthly woe, so it was natural that religion should step in as usual to set politicians by the ears. We have already seen Mrs. Fitzherbert ruined, while honest people grieved. The sober-sided had been growing more and more ashamed since then of the disgraceful thralldom which ground Roman Catholics into the dust. Their persecution was worthy of the darkest days of ignorance, and public opinion, anxious

as usual for reform, called for the speedy emancipation of serfs for conscience' sake. But would-be reformers reckoned without the King, who consistently loathed the Scarlet Woman with the unreasoning hatred of a lunatic. It was a *sine qua non* with him, that all who desired to take office must share, or pretend to share, his feelings of narrow bigotry. As titular chief of the Opposition, the Prince of Wales was a strenuous advocate for Emancipation—to please Mrs. Fitzherbert, many people said—but, as time wore on, and the King's attacks of mental aberration increased in frequency, his opinions on this, as on other subjects, underwent a change.

When the Whigs, with Fox at their head, took office, they were handicapped by a pledge to the Roman Catholics with regard to this burning question, but finding themselves thwarted and threatened by angry majesty, they shilly-shallied, tried a compromise, tottered hither and thither for very feebleness of purpose; while, as for their attitude abroad, they were utterly and ludicrously hoodwinked by Talleyrand and his imperial master. "All the Talents" became a laughing-stock, a subject for scornful indignation. Fox at this juncture died. Freed from the influence of their leader, and disgusted with their folly, the Prince of Wales gave up the Whigs, and, in discarding their principles, withdrew his support from emancipation. For some years he ceased to take

interest in politics, while the country cursed the blunderers, regretting the days of Pitt.

The national mind of England never comes to a wholly wrong conclusion. The innumerable diverse currents which sway a nation that may freely express its thoughts, sustain the healthy activity of opinion much as the grand contrivances of nature keep the air sweet, the ocean pure. After the demise of Fox, his administration stumbled along for awhile under Grey and Grenville, and when at last it fell to pieces, 'twas amidst general relief and joy. Then followed a ministry under the leadership of the Duke of Portland, an amiable nonentity, who appointed Mr. Percival, a rising lawyer and promising debater, to be Chancellor of the Exchequer; while the three Secretaries of State—Castlereagh, Canning, and Hawkesbury—held office for War, Foreign Affairs, the Home Department. But his Grace of Portland was old, and not a little imbecile; Percival, who hated the Catholics, was but half-fledged, and a molecule at best; Castlereagh was hampered and ill at ease with his colleagues. An impenetrable pall of mediocrity seemed to have fallen over Government. It was sad that the bungling ministry of "All the Talents" should give place to nothing better than that of "All the Hacks;" and this at a time of extremest peril, when England stood alone among the vanquished nations to stem the growing torrent of Bonaparte's ascendancy.

In 1807 Napoleon wielded a power unequalled since the days of Charles V. Europe was to be conquered, and he conquered Europe, and then sat down at leisure to divide the spoil among his soldiers. England alone resisted the conqueror; but though she made shift to stand erect, she had been grievously wounded, her resources had been severely tried. She had paid foreign armies, had lavished her wealth and her blood, with no return but that of seeing the Continent crouching at the foot of the foe. Was she to sink in turn, or might she yet endure? That was the question. If she might be victorious, in spite of overwhelming odds, who was to lead to victory? Generals she had, and admirals, and money yet at the bottom of her purse, but if unsupported at home her sons would be fighting with tied hands. Napoleon was not slow to take advantage of the difficulty. Spain and Portugal were in vassalage to France, but this was not enough. The incompressibility of British commerce offended the nostrils of the Emperor. Its prescription from Spain and Portugal could only be assured by the presence of French troops. He poured his forces across the Pyrenees and galloped over the Peninsula. But England met him there, resolved on Spanish soil to fight for life or death, and anxious lookers-on perceived with sorrow that the horizon was dark with clouds.

Time passed. His Grace of Portland was gathered

to his fathers. Mr. Percival, *faute de mieux*, took up the reins—fit chief for so weak a Cabinet. Not but what he was a good sort of man in his way. A more wholesome atmosphere than the one he breathed might have raised his moral tone. In private life he was not disliked. As an orator, he was sufficiently fluent, without the wit and *bonhomie* of North, the argumentative decision of his quondam rival Fox, or the bold and commanding eloquence of his friend and precursor Pitt. He did not shine, but he was not so dull as some. Under his guidance affairs at home dragged weakly on, and feebly enough abroad.

In 1811 an event occurred which divided England between feelings of grief and of rosy expectation. The affliction which at intervals since 1788 had darkened the faculties of majesty returned with overwhelming force. The Queen endeavoured to conceal the truth ; but it transpired that the King was mad again, as well as blind, and that his recovery from this, the most violent of his attacks, was little probable. A Regency Bill was passed in February, 1811, transferring the rights and duties of the crown to the Prince of Wales, with certain restrictions, which were to last a year, on the chance of the patient's rallying. With a new sovereign in the full bloom of life—it soon became apparent that the reign of George III. was all but nominally over—it was to be supposed that a new and

vigorous policy would be inaugurated. Ministers would be changed; the House swept and garnished; fresh blood would certainly be sought to revive the fainting country. The Whigs, headed by Grey and Grenville, burned to retrieve the past, and looked hopefully to him whom they persisted in considering their chief for a chance to redeem defeat. The Regent must perforce emerge from retirement. The companions of his youth had all been Whigs, they said. What mattered it that, in the interval, the party should have earned opprobrium? However ill-advised they had been, he would cling to old friends, even though they might roll him in the mud. While reckoning chances, they were deficient in memory as well as talent; for they forgot the story of Prince Hal, the fate of Nym and Bardolph. An additional assurance that their time of triumph was at hand lay, they considered, in the fact that the Regent had a grudge against Percival. How could it be otherwise, since that person was, or had been, the prime adviser of odious Caroline? Of course the offender would be plunged into outer darkness among the very first. Ardent aspirants formed and reformed the future Cabinet according to their fancies and desires, and in so doing overlooked several important points which might have dashed their hopes. His Royal Highness had had good cause in the past to be disgusted with the Whigs, and there was no particular reason to

suppose that they had improved in the interim. A man who had seen so much of life, who had suffered and been abused more than he deserved, who had already been made to bear the brunt of others' sins, was likely, in the first instance, to consider what was most to his own advantage, to seek the course which led to peace and quiet. His political notions, snubbed and repressed as he had always been by his father, were never very firm; and the Whigs (with a single exception) whom he had loved were dead. My lords Grey and Grenville, firm allies, were totally deficient in the social attractions which had made Fox so brilliant a star; and, moreover, Grenville was in the black books of his Royal Highness, with a double cross against his name, while Percival's had only one. The latter, to give himself importance and draw attention to the fact that he existed, had been guilty of the heinous sin of advising the Dreadful Woman. That was bad, and it would require heavy pressure from an influential source to bring about his pardon. But Grenville had committed two awful crimes—his guilt was double-dyed. Was he not Secretary of State when the never-sufficiently-to-be-regretted matrimonial alliance was arranged, and had he not sat on the abortive Delicate Investigation Committee, and helped to bring in the exasperating verdict? George felt no friendship for Grey, and hated Grenville. The

only survivor of the sparkling coterie which once rendered Carlton House the head-quarters of Opposition was Sheridan, and he, poor fellow, was too crushed by misfortune to care about re-entering the political arena now. Till the end he was a Whig, repulsing the blandishments of Toryism; but had he been induced to speak at this juncture, he would probably have decided to be neutral, for he personally disliked Grey and Grenville, in that when opportunity offered they had been stingy and mean to their supporters. His influence over the Regent was powerful still, but he was too depressed to use it, too much mangled by trouble's harrow to volunteer political opinions.

There was a lever working against the Whigs, whose importance they did not realize. His Royal Highness was addicted to dallying. Too indolent to think, unless hard driven, he liked to hear petticoated darlings air their sentiments—was a willing Telemachus at the feet of a sage Calypso. One lady or another occupied the post of President of the secret council, retaining the office for a lengthened period, for his Royal Highness was too lazy to be fickle. At this moment *Madame la Presidente* was the Marchioness of Hertford. No, madam; you are quite wrong, and need not sniff behind your fan. The Regent's devotion to Lady Hertford was perfectly platonic; even Caroline admitted as much, who did not say kind

things. She was an energetic elderly person with brains, who, having discovered that Cupid is god of mischief, amused herself with politics, in which she took special interest, for the sake of husband and son. The former was Lord Chamberlain ; a Polonius whose family was conspicuous for attachment to the throne—a respectable old party who was fond of his dinner, and had the grace, ignored by too many others, to conceal his private naughtiness in a bower in Seamore Place. His middle-aged son, Lord Yarmouth, a sociable dog, was particularly obnoxious to Brummel, who indulged in feeble jokes anent red herrings, at the expense of his fiery hair ; for was he not of the *vieille souche*, while the beau was a *parvenu*, and did he not go in and out of Carlton House as if it were his own, and sneer at Nym and Bardolph ? My lady was a clever, far-seeing woman, who had once been beautiful ; who made the usual post-marital discovery that she had married the wrong husband ; and who, resigning without shrieks the hope of a mutual mind, made the best of the bonbons of this life, scoffing at its cares. The world elected to talk scandal about Lady Hertford, at which she shrugged her shoulders. As for the Prince of Wales, he was in evil odour, so all he did was wrong.

For reasons of her own, my lady espoused the cause of Percival ; so he did well not to despair of ultimate forgiveness. She pointed out, as in the

sanctity of the boudoir she glanced up from her embroidery, that he was not more stupid than Grey and Grenville, and that, although dull enough, nothing was to be gained by change. Like better men, he could be a turncoat, and kick over, if need were, the ladder that Caroline had held for him. Save for his own advantage, why should he be indignant about Caroline? 'Twould look mighty well, indeed, if her staunch ally were to hold up his hands and reluctantly throw her over. The steersman was not strong; yet might he prove the safest pilot, if his boat could only be manned by a few new and stalwart sailors. Following close upon this counsel came mysterious hints that, if the Regent would maintain the present administration, he would find its members attentive guardians of his interests. He was skilfully reminded that, in the matter of Frederick and Mary Anne—an affair which rankled in the breast of George—the Whigs had been offensive and intractable. It was hinted that, if encouraged, there was nothing to prevent the adviser of the Dreadful Woman from becoming the slave of her spouse. His Royal Highness hummed and hawed, delayed, procrastinated. It was terrible to be adjured to show decision. Instead of declaring for one side or the other, he parleyed, threw out commonplaces, babbled of his sire's wishes, of the pain that would accrue from the expulsion of a father's ministers,

declared that in so serious a crisis he must take time for study and reflection. He coquetted with the old flame, held out hopes to the Whigs, was beset with conscientious scruples, wavered and demurred till both Government and Opposition, toyed with alternately, were maddened by tantalizing throes. At the bottom of all this was the old trouble of raising the wind, complicated with a determination to suppress Caroline, and the anguish of constitutional indecision. Which party would prove most helpful in the matter of the gruesome female? Which would promise to remove the grinding millstone of debt? Which would restore to York his forfeited honours and emoluments? Each side was to bid for power, while the auctioneer faltered and vacillated. Weeks and months passed in fruitless negotiation. The business of the country was at a standstill. The bidders, harried and agonized, became as undecided as the royal arbiter; and he, finding himself immeshed in entanglements of his own ravelling, grew utterly confused and irresolute, and straightway took to his bed.

We are prone to be irate with others for the results of our own mistakes. George swore from behind his curtains that such universal haziness of purpose was unworthy of a Regent wild. What a chance was off the matrimonial burthen! Why not throw down their cards, and they were prepared to do to relieve

a tortured master ? Really, such shilly-shallying on the part of practical politicians was a crying, unfeeling shame ! How was it possible to decide anything ? The Regent couldn't and wouldn't, and the fault was none of his. Their conduct had made him ill. He drew the curtains closer, and pulled up the clothes over his night-cap.

This was all very well ; but how was Government to be conducted ? Was Mr. Spencer Percival to understand that no change was to be made at present ? No reply, except a volley of groans from the bed. His Royal Highness must be kept quiet, or fever would supervene. Would Mr. Percival be good enough to go away, and tell the majordomo to put down straw and tie up the knocker ? Ministers were no more able to reach the patient than their adversaries. Messages were received by Sheridan when sufficiently sober, by Vere, or Brummel, or Cribb, or Townshend the constable, or others of the smaller fry who might chance to be about. The only persons with whom the Regent would hold direct communication were the companions of festive hours. Periodically he rose and donned his stays and a plain frock, and took his griefs in a yellow chariot, and poured them in my lady's lap ; but on his way to Hertford House he invariably drew down the blinds, and declined to be stared at by a soul.

The end of the year 1811 found things in much the

same state as the beginning—inextricably tangled—while affairs abroad appeared even more menacing. In spite of the energy of Wellington, the subjugation of eastern Spain seemed to presage the concentration of an overwhelming force against the British cohorts in the west; and, should these be routed, nothing remained from the Vistula to the Pillars of Hercules capable of resisting the Corsican. Was England, after a dauntless display of courage, to hold out her wrists for the handcuffs? It seemed so. Meanwhile, the equally disappointing conflict dragged on its length at home, through summer, autumn, winter, between Tories on the brink and Whigs struggling up the precipice; while the Regent awaited the impossible, and embarrassments increased throughout the land. The reputation of Prince and ministry sank to zero. Riotous demonstrations became common in the manufacturing districts; pinching poverty and growing distress prevailed among the labouring classes; taxation, which, owing to a succession of campaigns, was already heavy, became unbearable; an alarming derangement in the currency carried havoc in pecuniary transactions. Demagogues seized every item to inflame the public mind. With the dawn of 1812, the Regent found himself compelled, amid a shower of curses, to untie the knocker and attend to business; and, undecided still, dissatisfied with both parties, he took refuge in a middle course,

and modified the existing Cabinet. My lady said, "Bravo! but why could you not do it before?" The Whigs, in a passion, threatened to espouse in a body the cause of the Dreadful Woman, and bring her to the front again. Would not that be a splendid way of punishing the Prince, whose perfidy was shocking? What could be the meaning of the proceedings at Carlton House? Lord Castlereagh was actually bidden to return to his duties, *vice* Wellesley deposed. Lord Castlereagh was a friend of the Hertfords. Were these horrid people to rule the roast? The period of restriction was coming to an end, and it seemed likely that, free to do as he liked, the Regent would be guilty of the unmentionable sin of openly avowing himself a Tory! Would the indecent creature *rat*? Oh no. Crafty and dissimulating, perhaps, but not so base and abandoned. 'Twas a ruse to gain time, for politicians of all hues passed under the classic colonnade. But some people are capable of anything. The spirits of Opposition had risen only to be dashed. On the 12th of January, 1812—date for respectable citizens to don mourning—Mr. Percival stood up in his place, and announced that he was authorized to reorganize the Cabinet. He addressed the House as its master, prated of the hopeless condition of the King, recommended a permanent rearrangement of the royal household, establishing it at one hundred and eighty thousand pounds per annum, with an additional

grant to the Regent of one hundred thousand pounds to cover the expenses of the year. A mere bagatelle, while men and women starved ! Who but a Tory could be so unblushing ? During the passing of the Bill, the minister was bitterly reviled for such extravagances ; but having a game to play, he played it, heedless of the execration which was freely poured both on Prince and self. It is sad to have to relate that, even after going such lengths rather than lose office, the Regent remained displeased. What about that millstone ? What of the Dreadful Woman ? “ Why not have gone straight to the country ? ” he grumbled. “ I am still deep in debt, because on that former occasion my father broke his word and did not set me free. Remove my millstone once for all, and I will keep straight.” But as far as that Percival dared not venture, any more than his rivals. By-and-by, perchance, when the trumpet’s blare should give place to piping peace ; not now. So all parties floundered, gazing wistfully for daylight through a fog ; and his Royal Highness, disgusted with everybody, himself included, drew the curtains again, and withdrew between the sheets.

CHAPTER VIII.

BRIGHTON.

THE people might suffer and the Prince of Wales feign illness, *cumuli* of danger abroad and misery at home might gather, yet the Court of the Regency was dazingly gay. To all intents and purposes, his Royal Highness became King in the early part of 1812, and to a great bashaw who loved externals it became urgently necessary to display his grandeur. Alack! We may no longer call him Florizel, the beautiful, radiant, royal boy! Stays will, no doubt, do much, but chins will double; crow's-feet and wrinkles mar a peachen cheek. No one but her papa forgot the existence of that great obtrusive, bouncing girl in the nursery. A youth in his own esteem, to the world he was a Grand Signor, ponderous, rotund, and handsome, but out of his teens some years since. Though the millstone remained about his neck, the days of empty pockets were gone, as far as he was concerned, for the time being. Never was minister more pliable than Percival, who, instead of cheeking his liege lord's

luxurious propensities, doled forth dribbling supplies that just sufficed to keep his mouth above the water. He had guineas now, ay, even banknotes now and then; and fingers might have been snapped at Care, but for the vengeful growling of disappointed Whigs and the diplomacy of the temporizing Premier. The Regent was so very unpopular in 1812 that the golden saloons and Gothic cathedrals of Carlton House lost their charm. Moreover, that elysium was so perfect that the most fastidious eye found little improvement to suggest. To one who was a captive to the enthrallments of bricks and mortar, the creation of a marine paradise offered irresistible attractions for the display of a refined taste. In middle life it is hard to adapt one's self to new duties. How could Prince George, who had been repressed in youth, take kindly now to toils of statecraft? Periods of transition, too, are desperately trying. Did not blameless Louis XVI. fall a victim to times that were out of joint? It is not fair to judge our ancestors who used horn-lanterns by the glare of the electric light. George was a scapegrace, but no worse than others whom now we venerate. His and that of his cronies was the licence of an elder *régime* wherein the animal was allowed to prowl by daylight, whereas we keep ours in the dark. I take it that both beasts, being of the same breed, roar in much the same fashion, one with a muzzle on less audibly. I am afraid that we who pretend superiority

have added two deities to our Olympus, full enough before, whom our rough, hearty progenitors scorned to worship—the gods of Humbug and of Cant. We must remember that in times of reaction minor offences are depicted in their worst light, and that at this particular moment public opinion was excessively severe. Secret societies were springing into existence, which aimed at doing for England by means of temporary anarchy that which was already done across the Channel. While the fevered thirst for change at any cost disturbed the lower class, the upper stratum remained in sneering *statu quo*. The middle-aged nobility—coarse in manner, loose in habit as their fathers were—offered a large bull's-eye to the shafts of invective, and were rather inclined by shrieks of demagogues to offer a defiant and scornful front than to bend before the blast. Burdett and other mountebanks worked on people's hearts rather than on their heads, appealed to warmth of feeling rather than to calm judgment.

This was the moment chosen by faithless Mary Anne to come into court again and rake up half-buried scandals; but, for a change, instead of washing royal linen she made an edifying display of her own. When villains fall out, a foul aroma riseth heavenwards. The conspirators in the York plot quarrelled, wrote pamphlets showing up each other, belched forth brimstone disclosures, raised a vile stench. "Peccavi!"

cried Mary Anne. "I have been unrighteous, even dissolute and scampish, not to say STGYIAN and SATANIC; but I repent and make confession. I told fibs, yea, even in the witness-box, to the detriment of innocents, and am a bad, perjured girl. The Duke never listened to my prattle. It was for loaves and fishes—they were so scarce on the establishment—that I made believe to procure commissions, and wrote notes in my lover's pocket-book, which he thought were in his own handwriting." Oh, Mary Anne, Mary Anne, thou wert indeed a cunning brazen slut! It transpired that Wardle the patriot had failed to pay the sum for which she engaged to perjure herself; so, regardless of her own character, determined to be revenged on him, she appeared in her real colours. Exit patriot Wardle from the stage, pursued by hoots and hisses. George was delighted, of course, at this somewhat tardy *dénouement*, for he loved brother scapegrace, and hastened as soon as might be to reinstate him in his abdicated command.

So "good" King George went into earthly limbo, and the Regent occupied the throne. He was his own master now—too late. His habits at the age of forty-nine were too firmly fixed to improve with better days. Having occupied his mind so long with the construction of Gothic halls and strange pagodas, he found it painful to be pulled by the toe out of a snug bed; and there is no knowing how he would have endured the

tugs of frantic statesmen, but for the friend who lived at Hertford House. To him her boudoir was a haven of rest, where responsibilities could be shuffled off. Who so helpful as she, who, instead of abusing other women, delivered lectures on affairs, and defended the mistakes of weak-kneed Percival? Yarmouth, also, it was a pleasure to meet; for he kept within due bounds, inherited the talents of his mother, and was, moreover, of a sentimental turn that was not devoid of interest. He had a whimsical habit of inditing love-letters at the breakfast-table with his mouth full of muffin and partridge, in which he took the constellations of the universe to witness that he was dying of galloping decline—victim of feminine cruelty.

But while we gossip with senile prosiness, his Royal Highness has rushed off in the yellow chariot, the blinds drawn down, with his mind made up of its own accord for once. My lady brews a dish of tea, and he announces to her and Yarmouth, as he adjusts the curls of his wig, that he is about to turn over a new leaf. Patience doesn't answer. He is weary of being chafed by the scum that rises when a nation boils. He objects to being nicknamed "Squab;" considers the caricatures in the print shops offensive, for they make him fat and old, whereas he is nothing of the sort. Some day he will die, and then folks will realize the extent of their loss, and regret ingratitude; meanwhile, till the lieges learn better ways, he will

retire to the Pavilion, flee from boring Percival, employ a cultured leisure in the erection of Chinese marvels. What does my lady say, and Yarmouth? What says Polonius, whose taste is so refined? Will he come and help? He is a connoisseur in art matters, and the change will do him good. Such josses; such pagodas! My lord Hertford's assistance will be invaluable, for there is naught he doth not understand. Painting, cock-fighting, cooking, fencing; profligacy or morals; languages alive or dead; Burgundy or black strap; the flavour of venison or the breeding of poll-parrots; the society of a bishop or a scullery-maid;—nothing comes amiss to his well-oiled tongue. My lady likes Brighton, so does Yarmouth, so does Hertford. Brighton by all means. Directing minds being of one accord, the court is ordered to prepare for a move, and vast are the needful preparations.

Among other noble mansions, Osmington House was turned inside out and upside down, for the master when he moves must take with him his menagerie of male and female animals, whose transport requires a caravan. When Noah emptied the Ark, what a fuss there must have been! what a cackling and screaming, what a flurry and stampede! Pepita and Ildefonza declared that they would rather perish than show upon the Steine without new gowns, hats, pelisses. Did my lord wish them to be disgraced for ever?

The stake or rack were preferable. Isabel's bracelets wanted resetting; Jemima's laces left much to be desired. My lord applied the Balmy-Brutal with effect. Like a squib, he fizzed a little, then blew up and burst into a coruscation of epithets. What did they take him for? Dash, dash! Money! There was none just now. They must wear old hats and dresses, or be left behind. Torrents of lamentation. The prospect was indeed appalling; his decision worthy of a savage. The belligerents agreed to a compromise. "Write to the agent at Battle Magna," he said to Mr. Smalley, who was in attendance; "he's a drone. The household may be an army, but armies must be clothed and fed. Trees must go. Birnam Wood must come to Dunsinane. Write, Master Cy, and call me at four. A man must sleep, and I sleep slow."

Obedient Cyrus returned in the afternoon and knocked, and was ordered by my lord, as he staggered to his feet, to examine the multitude of letters, which lay in an ominous heap. "Never mind the duns," hiccupped his patron, as, steadying himself with a shaky hand, he drank a jorum of Canelle. "Pick out the scented billets, donkey! The covers that are franked and stamped with a coat of arms. Damn the duns! They ought to be pleasing to Heaven, for they increase and multiply. There's a drawerful already of their precious twaddle."

What a clatter in the street when the caravan is at length equipped ! What a train of chariots from which peep raddled faces ! What a string of baggage-waggons, full of plate and frying-pans ; whiskies, curricles, sumpter horses, what not ! Sure my lord must be going to the antipodes with all his household gods ; or is it an ambulating circus ? Fig, the head-groom, commands the van, and by his side rides Juan Rodriguez, the Spanish factotum, smoking a cigar, whiskers *en papillottes*. A coach and four spanking bays are to convey my lord, who climbs upon the box, where Abigel is already seated, and, clad in a horsey coat of faintest lavender, takes the whip and ribbands. Hamlet, the jeweller, tired of dawdling in ante-chambers, and being politely shown the door, tries hard to reach his lordship ; but the latter is too quick for him, although he looks so willowy. "Clear the road !" he bawls, and cracks his whip. "Ease that wheeler's collar ; no, never mind. Dash, dash ! Out of the way. Sit steady, girl. Yep, yep, my beauties, off you go !" And off they are indeed, in clouds of dust, swinging round corners at the rate of twelve miles an hour, tearing along the highway, scattering pedestrians, as if the devil were behind.

The Brighton season at this period always began in May and ended in September.

The blood dances in the veins of fearless Abigel as the warm breeze fans her cheeks and the turnpikes

seem to fly. The Cock at Sutton is doing a roaring trade, for there are no less than twenty-eight public coaches on the road, to say nothing of private vehicles. Jackson, the bruiser, who married the buxom landlady, hurries hither and thither with cooling drinks, finding a moment to shake hands with Cyrus and ask after Thomas Cribb. The best of liquor is Jackson's, for he's hand and glove with the smugglers. "Yep, yep, off again!" Horsecloths are snatched away by nimble ostlers; the groom too-toots upon his bugle. Off she is! "Steady, my beauties, down this hill." There's Miss Jeal at the door of the Tangier with a glass of elderberry wine—she's always there—and rabbit puddings all piping smoking hot. On again. Blest if there isn't the Quicksilver upset, the passengers scattered in the road, while the guards in red and gold rush to the horses' heads. Out of the way! "Dash, dash! yep, yep!" My lord must pass. Pick up the fragments afterwards. Dear heart, what pleasant travelling, what stirring incidents, what betting, what excitement! Yonder are the fast coaches, that boast they can do the journey and return in a single day. My lord will race them; is open to any odds. There's the Alert with its yellow wheels, the Comet, the Irresistible, driven each by an amateur who touches his hat to his passengers for half a crown, although he is worth a plum. Sir Vincent Cotton tools the Rocket, my lord Clommel the Dart, and he is a shrewd

fellow who can guess they are not in the trade. Yonder's Mr. Akers, vice-chairman of the Four-in-hand Club; but he'll be ruined very soon, and will take to the road as a profession. Nor will he blush for that. Why should he? The driver of the stage is a most important person, let me remind you. Half the business of the county passes through his hands, and the satisfying of hundreds of appetites upon his fiat. At Reigate, where they dine—the roads through Lewes or Horsham are voted vulgar—the sly but civil waiter loads the board, then says with an obliging smirk, "You've got just three minutes to eat, for the coachman is putting to." Three minutes! What's to be done that time may be gained for dinner? A tumbler of sherry mollifies the whip, and an opportune shower of shillings makes him placable. Then hey for the road, and here's the health of the driver! My lord has long distanced the caravan, which will arrive in detachments during the night—Pepita hungry and rude, Ildefonza querulous, Chiquita and Isabel thirsty and blaspheming. It is well to escape their complaints, but a pause must be made somewhere that Cyrus and the Spanish valet may get ahead and see that all's ready for their master. An hour may be passed agreeably at Staplefield, where Abigel from her seat may pluck unripe cherries, while my lord inaugurates a maggot-race and loses ten guineas to the rustics. At Hand-Cross, too, they may linger for a moment,

exchanging jokes with the publican, who suggests a glass of gin and a slice of spiced gingerbread.

It is dusk by the time they rattle into Castle Square. The weathercock on the roof of the Old Blue coach office is scarcely visible. But the Steine is full of movement, and Abigel leans out of her window opposite Raggat's Club, where dice eternally rattle, and gazes at Mrs. Fitzherbert, who dwells across the green. Beautiful sad lady, recluse amid the vortex of billowing fashion, how regal she looks as on her spacious balcony she moves to and fro, lighting an array of candles. How Abby would like to know her! Sure 'twould please the Prince. But what of my lord? Mrs. Fitzherbert never liked my lord, although she put up with him for George's sake. Would she renew acquaintance? Hardly; for she shuns the world, living alone for the present with her niece, whose education occupies her hours.

The theatre has just closed—it is over early, as none of the few streets can boast of lamps—and the *ton* enjoy the air upon the Steine, although it is poor as a promenade. A circular path of bricks keeps ladies' feet out of the mud; but the centre is rough and unkempt, with ugly mushroom rings, and nets hung out to dry. There's a band, which is an attraction, and the belles and beaux are walking. The Grand Signor may be perceived stretching his limbs after his journey upon the Pavilion lawn; the Marl-

boroughs, on the steps of Marlborough House, admire the turmoil from within green wooden palings; and Mrs. Fitzherbert is just receiving a small knot of intimates, with the help of pretty Miss Seymour. It is vastly fashionable, though the company on the brick walk may hardly be called select. Beaux sigh for a second, as they think of their comrades—such bloods last season—exiled now to France, or languishing in the King's Bench, as they themselves may soon be; and then they turn to quiz young wives through gold-rimmed glasses or bandy words with a demirep. "Ah, my lady Betty's looking charmingly—like Venus, she has risen from the waves!" And then they mark how many a hoyden miss, who tripped last season in a beehive hat and ringlet-locks to waist, now sports a dozen tiers of flounces at the least; while her head is lost under a martello tower, beflowered like a walking greenhouse. Fiddlers, dancing masters, tooth-drawers, elbow each other on the Steine; army and navy contractors, who've been knighted; clippers of soldiers' coats; destroyers of the stomach's ditto; all classes meet cheek by jowl, from noble duke to pig-merchant. Ambling coquettes are there, who have assumed the shabby genteel, to draw the attention of whom it may concern to "*les beaux restes d'une vertu chancelante*;" acknowledged Cyprians; powdered, bewhiskered, padded militaires, whose curls have been whitened and

pomatumed by Roulard. Russet-wigged tradesmen, fortune-hunters, and hunted fortunes pass and repass in the gloaming like figures in the Fantoccini. Sea-Fencibles, in smart uniforms, pretend to be longing for invasion; while the clatter of trinket auctions disturbs the card-players in the libraries, who are deep in pam or loo, to the strains of harps and violins. But, good lack, this uproar's nothing to that which will prevail in the morning! How fond of beer folks are in this droughty ocean air! There's an inn to every thirty houses, and scarce a door where you might not obtain a drop by knocking, while waiting your turn to be dipped by honest Martha Gunn. Brighton teems with tippling-houses, from Belle Vue fields, with its crazy arch and capstan (Regency Square now occupies its place), to the distant Level, where the soldiers exercise. Every bird and beast in all creation seems pictorially present to the view, swinging from rusty irons. There's the Cat and Wheel, the Greyhound, Dolphin, White Horse, Black Lion, Spotted Dog, Hen and Chickens, Phoenix, Eagle, Unicorn—a garden of zoology—and, modestly retiring from the sea landwards, there's the Rising Sun and King and Queen. This last is kept by a loyal sergeant of Huzzars, who has made a cunning hole in his back wall that looks on the barrack-yard, through which, upon a mystic signal, beer may flow in rivers. The boozing-kens for gentlefolk are the Castle and

the Ship, and between them there is a wholesome rivalry. The Castle, standing close to the Pavilion, enjoys royal patronage. Mr. Shergold can boast of magnificent saloons, in which princes have often feasted; the great Mr. Brummel himself will drive often to the door, and, ordering the best rooms, best dinner, and best Lafitte, be sure not to meet with disappointment. But Mr. Hicks's Ship, being central, is the resort of many fashionable visitors; and it has been amicably arranged between the rivals, that each shall occupy three nights per week with entertainments, leaving the remaining three open to the other. On Sunday, there is always tea and promenade at the Castle, under direction of the M.C., where, in the fine ball-room, for half a crown, you walk and talk, and, on ringing of a bell, sit down to tea and toast; then walk and talk again. The guests at the Pavilion usually, I grieve to say, sit down to cards: but, after all, perhaps, they are no worse than their neighbours; for it is awful to think of the spiteful things that must have been said, the venomous tittle-tattle that must have been bandied, during those protracted hours of incessant walk and talk.

At Brighton all classes meet upon a common ground, and their vices are of much the same complexion. The City belles, possessing no country seat, burning to ape their betters in fashion and folly and a prevailing passion for notoriety, fly eagerly to the queen

of watering-places, and boldly launch themselves upon the glowing river of high life. Though clever in their trades, they are conspicuous for lack of learning, and become an easy prey to the marching army of impostors, who, like sharks, follow in their wake. The place teems with Irish fortune-hunters—good-looking men, who possess one suit of clothes wherein to frequent theatres, masquerades, and public walks, and beguile some heiress, by a strict attention to business, into a trip to Gretna Green. The *élite* of rank visit Brighton because the Prince of Wales goes there, because the country is dull, because amusement is a necessary of life. Where could a more ever-varying change be found than at Brighton? In the morning a dip, a ride or walk, a turn in a pleasure-boat, a lounge at the library to con the last wicked novel, listen to the last prurient tale. Later on, the play; then the parade, where, under cover of the dark, modish rakes and impudent voluptuaries can arrange to batten on new pastures; then the ball, where half-clad maidens practise wanton dances, displaying their forms through thinnest gauze, with the aid of the cymbals or the skipping-rope. Certainly the costume, or rather want of costume, patronized at this period by the fair is as hideous as indecent. A reason for its ugliness may be found in the fact that English women have long been secluded by war from foreign modes, and, devoid of

taste, have invented eccentricities of their own. Straight pelisses are worn of many hues. A body and skirt must never match in colour. Summer and winter alike, they clothe themselves in scanty bags of cobweb texture. In winter, they assume a muff and tippet or long boa, which comforts are rendered useless by the unseasonableness of the remainder of their garb; for, while the hand and neck may be warm, the rest of the body is half-naked. The meagre folds of drapery are arranged so as to conceal as little as may be. They have a practice, which is not pretty, of wearing purses in their bosoms and bags at their sides, instead of pockets. They cut off their own hair, and don wigs of various shades. One lady of quality actually left her wig at Laurence's, rather than be troubled to sit to the painter for the portrait of her head. As dress and manners are, there is no knowing virgins from women of the town; for men profess to detest prudes, preferring those whose freedom of mien declares a mind disposed to gaiety; and, of course, the fair respond to the demand rather than become old maids. The parasol and veil have been ingeniously contrived to speak a language, and in expert hands become attractive and dangerous implements. Some ladies attend the parade every day at Hove to ogle the officers, attired in tight blue habits, brodered spencers, and regulation stable-caps of fur, with a gold border, and afterwards join the mess, and hobnob with the military.

It is striking twelve, and the great bell is ringing for public breakfast in the Grove. In sooth, his Royal Highness may well prefer Brighton to London; for people are glad to see him here, and the announcement of his name in connection with some entertainment is sure to draw a crowd. The Steine, if useful as a promenade, is treeless—open to all the vulgar mob who may choose to jostle the *élite*; whereas the Grove, with its rows of noble elms, its rookery, its cool and umbrageous nooks and velvet turf, offers a secluded rendezvous for blue-blooded scandal-mongers. There is always something going on to while away the hours—pony races, concerts, fireworks, peep-shows; but of all the numerous delights, the pleasantest is public breakfast. Long tables are spread upon the Rutland Walk, under the sweeping boughs; friends make up parties, and sit together in groups; whilst boys, concealed amid the foliage, warble a glee of Purcell's or the "Friar of Orders Grey." The entertainment is inexpensive, too; for a morning repast is provided, consisting of fruits, meats, jellies, with tea, coffee, and chocolate, all for the modest sum of eighteen-pence; and the noblest in the land are not above partaking of the fare, and joining in the innocent recreation. "All that's bright must fade," the poet tells us, and the mornings in the Grove are doomed.

This is the last season; for Ahab covets Naboth's vineyard, and is about to join it to the grounds of the

Pavilion, and shut the public out. The dancing-room, the cottage where we drink syllabub, the reading-lounge, are shortly to be swept away; but, like victims for the sacrifice, are lavishly adorned this season with leafy ornaments and elegant transparencies and mottoes. "Long live the Prince!" appears at the end of the crosswalk, artfully limned by Mr. Cripps, and wreathed with woodbine and lilies; "Bright-helmstone's support" glares from the other end, encircled by oak and acorns. It is vastly pretty, and the higher-class public will not regret the addition of this garden to the Pavilion; for, of course, they will be asked to the Regent's parties, and obtain their jellies gratis.

For reasons with which we are familiar, his Royal Highness vacated the metropolis, and travelled down with jovial Frederick in a phæton, drawn by three horses, a postillion riding one, while he himself managed the other two; and fashionable London followed its liege lord. Mr. Sheridan and Alvanley put up at the Pavilion, as did likewise my lord Yarmouth and his parents, while the rest of the world perched where it could. The incorrigibly jocose Alvanley, while he tied his neckcloth in his dark bedroom, hummed a refrain and improvised doggerel verses. He sang—

"The Folly at Brighton is drilled round with holes;
Teapots, extinguishers, are stuck upon poles.

The inside, all tea-things and dragons and bells;
 The show-rooms all tinsel, the sleeping-rooms cells.
 But the grand curiosity that is to be seen
 Is the owner himself, our dear mandarin—
 Patron of painters, who copy designs
 That grocers and tea-dealers hang up for signs.
 Thus teaboard-taste artists gain pelf and distinction,
 And the title of "Teapot" shall last to extinction.
 Behold his great chair into which he falls—*soas*—
 And sits in his china shop like a large Joss;
 His parvenus round him in tea-tray array,
 His peahens about him to render him gay."

Alvanley might have grown indiscreet in his poetic frenzy, but at this juncture the valet fortunately entered. He announced that the Regent was gone to the Grove to breakfast with my lord and my lady Hertford, and had begged that he would follow before the toast was cold.

As Alvanley passed the Castle Tavern on his way to join his royal master, he was well-nigh run over by a coach drawn by four splendid roans. "Curse the careless wretch!" he was beginning; but anger turned to welcome. "Why, Brummel, is it you? Since when have you taken to drive a team, and why do you trample on your friends?"

"Beg pardon," answered the beau, with imperturbable calm; "obliged to tool four now, for my fellow Robinson gave me warning for making him travel with a pair. Isn't that so, Robinson?"

"Yes, sir," acknowledged that worthy with fine disdain.

"That green Benjamin of yours is not so bad. Who suffers?"

"Stultz, poor man!" replied the other, delighted in spite of himself at the approval of the censor.

"H'm! Weston or Schweitzer are less objectionable. Should have come down yesterday, but for difficulties with my tradesmen—the banker fellows, you know. London empty last night—passed an evening of purgatory. A set of second-raters invaded the bow-window at White's—absolutely true. 'Pon my soul, never saw anything so impossible! They're not well-born, or rich, or good-looking, or clever, or agreeable—only insolent. They hate and abuse everybody, are too grand to laugh, have appalling appetites and no digestion. Swore and used stable slang in the most vulgar way, and after dinner, I am glad to say, fell in a heap under the table."

"Do you mean you dined with them?" inquired Alvanley, amused by the beau's disgust at the phantoms of his own creation.

"Hardly," returned the other, with raised eyebrows. "Couldn't be seen in the same room with 'em. Not gentlemen."

"Ah!" laughed Alvanley, "there's a poser. What's a gentleman?"

Brummel flicked the wheeler's ear with his whip, and, after a pause, turned languidly to his valet. "Robinson, what is a gentleman?"

The valet knitted his brows. "I should say, sir, one who don't gain his livelihood."

"Not bad," said Alvanley, with a roguish look at his friend. "I should say, one whose necktie is irreproachable."

"No," dissented Brummel, sighing. "Robinson here can manage that, as well as I, after long teaching. A gentleman, I think, is a man with polished manners, who keeps his hands out of his pockets, and never commits himself in conversation."

The beau's beautiful horses had drawn around them an admiring circle. People stood at their doors to marvel at his curly hat and coat of plum-colour. A fat lady on a balcony overhead hemmed and sniffed, trying hard to attract his attention, and at last called out, "Welcome to Brighton, Mr. Brummel. Won't you step up for a bit? Do now!"

The beau turned his head coldly, and gazed with inquiry at Robinson, who in turn gazed at his master. Sure the woman must be demented. She was not going to lose her opportunity, however. The admiring crowd should know that, though a City lady, she was on speaking terms with the great man, and so she shouted again, "Do come up and take a dish of tea." The second-rate dandies were offensive enough; these City ladies worse. A gleam of mischief shone in the small grey eyes, as Brummel stared upwards and remarked, in crystal accents, "Madam, you take

medicine, and you take a liberty, but you drink tea ;” and, flicking up his horses, drove off into the stable-yard.

At the Grove, whither he sauntered presently, the royal party were assembled under an elm, breakfasting a few yards away from the common table. My lady Hertford wore a crimson velvet pelisse edged with swansdown, a white beaver hat with plume of ostrich feathers, and low shoes of gold tissue—a chaste and elegant *ensemble* for the morning, which was speedily reproduced by several less august ladies upon the promenade. Abigel was in plain white, with a tiny orange cap set jauntily upon her crisp ringlets. Miss Rowe was improving *à vue d’œil* ; had fallen into modish ways, as if to the manner born ; had learned quite naturally to loll in bed till midday, as a fashionable damsel should, perusing a novel over a dish of chocolate. She could gossip with becoming languor about the latest ballet ; lisp careless criticisms and gabble politics ; descant with fluency about the pathos of Siddons, the humour of Munden, the vivacity of Lewis, the drollery of Bannister and Jordan and Mellon ; or glibly discuss the simple muse of Cowper, the descriptions of the horrific Radcliffe, the morality of Hannah More. Everybody was delighted with her—even Brummel—and Sheridan vowed she was Lady Teazle to the life. Her worldliness at this juncture quite astonished—not to say dismayed—the Princess

Charlotte, who, mewed up at the Lower Lodge, could not boast of such complete accomplishments. The old days in the woods at Battle Magna seemed like an echo of some previous existence. Sure she was born to purple and fine linen; had not been recently adopted. But then there was cousin Cy, the pugilist and hanger-on, whose presence, like that of the slave at a Roman triumph, seemed to whisper, "Remember the past and shun conceit, for you are a daughter of the people." What of that? If her great-aunt was a housekeeper, Brummel's grand-dad was a lackey. She had done so well, and could hold her own so capitally among aristocratic maids, that Madam Pentecost could not be otherwise than satisfied that the incubus would never return to her. Abigel herself was under the same impression, for Lord Osmington behaved as a father might, and there was no question between them of the future. Taking a leaf out of his book, her treatment of my lord was quite in the Balmy-Brutal style; for she domineered over him and ordered him about, and if he showed signs of disobedience, frowned and stamped. Then he would be mightily tickled by the little termagant, and say, "That's right! Though you are a lovely vixen, 'tis wise to remember that the empire of women has naught to do with beauty. Many an ugly woman has reigned supreme and long; for beauty fades, but ill-temper is perennial. Cultivate ill-temper, my love,

since the bravest men quail before it, and are subdued." Her wrath was like summer lightning, and amused the coterie, who laid traps to draw her out. She lectured the Prince of Wales, taking him roundly to task with solemn wisdom; whereupon he made violent love to her, and then she flew in a passion. Somehow it was distasteful to Miss Rowe that Charlotte's papa, whom, with girlish enthusiasm, she so admired, should sigh in her ear and breathe out his flame. 'Twas as if the idol before whom we were kneeling should suddenly descend and stand on our own level. She would be so provoked sometimes as to clench her fist and say something severe, and then Lord Osmington would veer round and rebuke the angry maiden. Lady Hertford took the damsel's part, explaining to the gentlemen that a girl in so odd a position was obliged to be particularly careful, and that my lord, if he meant honourably towards her, should assist his *protégée* rather than add difficulties to the *rôle* he had given her to play. "Do you mean to marry her, or what?" my lady asked point-blank; upon which my lord looked puzzled, and vowed he did not know. "She's as good as gold, so you mustn't do her wrong!" my lady said, with a warning finger. "You've given her the tastes and taught her the acquirements of our set, so you'll have to see that she doesn't come to shipwreck. Education is a snare sometimes; teaches us to accept any amount of falsities which, in our limited

circle, are taken for current coin. In Sumatra people eat their parents when they are old and useless, and the victims prepare themselves willingly for sacrifice; for they've been brought up to look on it as right, and stifle natural instinct. The education you've given her is false, fitted only to our sphere. I don't know what would happen to the child, if obliged to return to the country." The matron need not have been anxious, for Abigel's fine-ladyisms were only skin-deep. Under the veneer she was much what she used to be, quite capable of standing alone. Able too, apparently, to fight other people's battles, for she ventured more than once to tell his Royal Highness openly that Charlotte's complaints were just, that she ought to be removed from the nursery. At this breakfast-party, she laid on the Regent's plate a letter, wherein Charlotte related that she had been to the Opera and enjoyed the unusual treat. Papa pushed it aside with pettish movement, and told her friend that it was Charlotte's own fault if she were kept back. "When she is allowed to appear," he said, "she does it as an ill-mannered, turbulent tom-boy, who is led by her horrid mother. What must she do at this very performance, but lay herself out to vex me? Did she not choose the public opportunity to rise and kiss her hand to Grey and Grenville, whom she knows that I dislike? Establish her, indeed! Not till she grows more dutiful." Abigel looked

grave and said nothing, for indeed it was wrong of Charlotte thus to annoy her father. Had he not, without her naughtiness, a sufficient pack of worries?

Even at festive Brighton, where he was appreciated, it was difficult altogether to avoid crumpled rose-leaves. Sheridan, pressed to give an opinion, prophesied shocking things about Mr. Percival and his government; hinted that so shrewd a woman as my lady must have strong motives of personal advantage for giving unsound advice to the Prince. This was deplorable bad taste on the part of Sherry, due to a paltry jealousy! Throw aspersions on the motives of dear Calypso! Why cannot people agree to jog along without quarrelling and destroying the peace of a *ménage*? My lady was furious, when she heard of it, at the interference of the battered wreck. His day was over; why could he not be silent? She pointed out that he was going downhill as fast as misfortune could carry him, that he grew less and less amusing and more careless of his outward man; begged the Grand Signor to banish him. But this the Regent was loth to do. It never should be said that he was ungrateful for service rendered. The voice which had been so potent in theatre and senate was dumb, but the broken statesman was dear old Sherry still. My lady was mortified and sullen, and made careful record of every delinquency, for which the Regent was forced to find excuse; and the list was ever growing of the

poor fellow's peccadilloes. Only yesterday did he not ask his boon companion Fred to lend him a ten-pound note; and Frederick, poor soul, out at elbow always, did he not parry the ill-timed request by stating he had nothing in the world but a note for fifty pounds? Such an avowal should have ended the matter among honourable *confrères*. But what did Brinsley? He uttered a low whistle, and stammered, "What! A note for fifty pounds! It's so long since I've seen one; oh! let me look at it." Frederick, guileless as usual, produced the paper, and Brinsley grabbed it like a cut-purse. Now, when our cronies pick our pockets thus, it is time to be indignant; and the good-natured York grew almost angry, till he reflected that his own lines were cast now in more pleasant places, and that it became him to show indulgence. He was in receipt again of his emoluments, while Sheridan was absolutely ruined. True, his creditors showed remarkable activity on quarter-day, and left him little cash; but for poor Sherry there was no quarter-day any more. The lamp of genius was extinguished. He lived from hand to mouth; none but himself knew how. When Drury Lane was rebuilt, after the fire, he was bought out of the concern for a sum of twenty thousand pounds, which was annexed by clamorous harpies, and but for his seat in Parliament would have fallen at once into the Fleet. Mr. Kemble was manager now, who,

smarting with sores, declined to lend a sixpence. Those who have been singed can feel for the victims of a fire. His Grace of York pitied his old crony, but showed him no more notes.

The Prince of Wales had other causes for dissatisfaction, which ruffled his temper and interfered with his internal comfort. The day had been successfully killed at the Grove till five. On the way back to the Pavilion he linked his arm in that of my lord Osmington, bidding his party follow, to witness a performance of the Fantoccini, with which the remainder of daylight was to be slain and a new appetite raised for dinner. Vere, who seldom so transgressed, took the opportunity to ask a favour. Would his Royal Highness ask his brother for a commission in a West India regiment? Now, what on earth could he want with such a thing, and blank, too? If for some youth whom he desired to benefit, why not something in the Guards?

"No; that would not suit," Lord Osmington admitted, with an effrontery that took the Prince's breath away. "I've no secrets from you, sir. I want to bestow it upon that superfine young gentleman who is attached to your royal consort."

Why? The Heir-Apparent, like all the rest of the world, had heard about Caroline's odd whim, and the absurd pretensions of her page. The early conduct of my lord in the matter had been curious; but why

should he all at once be so anxious to banish the comely youth to the home of yellow fever? He was harmless, and wrote lovely poems.

"There can't be anything in it, Vere?" the Prince asked, after a pause. "I mean as to his pretensions to a peerage. And yet it looks from your singular conduct as if you thought there might be."

"No, sir," replied my lord; "there's nothing in it, of course; but—damn him for his insolence!—I'd like to ship him across seas. The Princess Caroline might take it into her head to make him a cause for worry, and though nothing beyond that could come of it, it's as well to be ready for contingencies. Wearing the uniform, he'd be a gentleman out there; and I take it he wouldn't be such a fool as to throw away the chance."

But his Royal Highness shook his head, and remarked with gravity, "I don't like this, Vere. It's too like kidnapping. I hope there isn't more than you pretend in it. Does the upstart threaten you? Anyhow, I beg you'll not mention the subject to my brother; for he must do nothing after that *esclandre*, which our enemies might use as a handle."

Lord Osmington said no more, but, growing sulky in turn, added his quota to the prevailing crossness. However, these were trifles not worth serious consideration. The outlook was more rosy than it used to be. There is no high position without propo-

tionate drawbacks. The Premier did not satisfy the nation—no doubt of that; but it could not be helped. Lady Hertford, in her strange partisanship for Mr. Percival, actually promised in his name that, if the Regent would be patient, he would cautiously and effectually tackle the millstone, as soon as circumstances rendered possible so great a work. “Where,” she asked, “could you find a more useful and obliging servant? He’ll bring things comfortably shipshape; take my word for it.” Dear mentor! What she said so charmingly must be true, specially as her hints jumped with the Regent’s own desire. Did excellent Mr. Percival really intend to tackle that millstone? How soon? Peace of mind might then be his. He could feel a glimmer of it now, reflected from the amber morrow. There was no gainsaying that the minister had done much already. He provided funds—in dribblets doubtless—but still funds. Surely, all things considered, the Grand Signor had a right to be jubilant, and was justified in overlooking Sherry’s shady tricks and the questionable requests of Vere. Hopefully looking forward to the realization of the Premier’s promises, his royal master could even afford to forget a rude print which had just appeared, wherein “Squab” was encircled by patterns of jaseys, with an effigy on one side of Circe and her pigs, and Nebuchadnezzar at grass on the other. Yes; he felt cheerful on the whole, for no imminent

danger loomed ; was so amiably disposed as even to allow Brummel to occupy his favourite chair, while he discoursed sweet harmony on the violoncello, accompanied by Secretary Bloomfield. What mattered it that, after dinner, the gentlemen departed uproarious ; that honest folks were disturbed out of their sleep by whoops ; that one broke his nose, another a dozen lamps, and all of them the peace ? What did it signify that twenty pounds' worth of dinner glass had been demolished in the course of practical joking ? These were details concerning which it became not a philosopher to fret—mere trivial, floating bubbles. Having argued himself into so angelic and contented a frame of mind, it was mighty hard to be awakened in the night with the news that Mr. Percival was murdered.

CHAPTER IX.

HOT WATER.

Yes ; the minister who was to accomplish wonders was slain—done to death in the lobby of the House of Commons by a crazy wretch named Bellingham ; and the stream of troubles, which for a moment had been stemmed, was let loose again with increased volume. One of the least agreeable facts to the Prince concerning the murder was the way in which the news was received by the people ; for, after all, the unpopular acts of the victim were done for his master's behoof, and the latter was involved in the odium which was crusted about his name. The crowd that collected like flies around the House when the news spread was by no means thrilled with horror. The murderer actually received an ovation from the mob ; while in some towns, notably at Nottingham, parties went about with banners and drums, exulting in the crime.

Unlucky George seemed destined never to be out of hot water without instantly tumbling in again. The festive time that he had promised himself at Brighton among the teapots and extinguishers was abruptly

broken in upon ; for the tragical end of Mr. Percival, pigmy statesman though he was, piled the weight again upon his master's back, under which he had groaned so dreadfully. And with whom might he now advise ? Sheridan was a broken reed ; Brummel and Vere complete strangers to politics ; Lady Hertford at her wit's end, though she was still in favour of patching up the existing Cabinet rather than inaugurate a change. The indolent Regent would be glad enough to do so, if it were possible : but was it ? Had he not already been cursed and execrated for striving, like an obedient boy, to follow in his father's footsteps and employ his ministers ? The people professed to be enraged, because, instead of trying the Whigs (who even under Fox were a failure), he had preferred to let things proceed in their accustomed groove. What was to be done ? Could the unseaworthy vessel be sufficiently carpentered to proceed upon its voyage by the addition of an additional board or two and a new figurehead ? That, urged by her ladyship, was the momentous query which the perplexed Signor laid before his Chancellor. The Whigs desisted from abuse awhile and waited, lance in rest. Would the indecent *ratter* learn a lesson from the behaviour of the people after Percival's death ? Apparently not. Losing patience, they denounced their lord with fiercest screeches, as Janus-faced. Was ever jaseyed person so perfidious ?

Were ever such marvels of mendacity as corpulent Don Juan and many-sided, drunken Leporello? Broken indeed—retired from private life? Not a bit of it. Sheridan was fishing, as usual, in troubled waters, intriguing under the rose to please his master. The Regent was a miracle of craft, as undecided and procrastinating as ever. Lord Wellesley and Canning were played off against Grey and Grenville; while the Chancellor and Lord Liverpool (erst Hawkesbury) were posting constantly to the Pavilion. What business had they there? Lord Liverpool, just think of that! A foolish, prosy, incompetent peer! What could be the Regent's real intentions, hidden, as they were, under a mountain of diplomacy? Why not try the Whigs? Why lean so persistently towards the old rickety set? Was it that he aspired in his own person to command its imbecility, or was it some deep design of the Hertford woman? On his part, the Prince complained that he could obtain no assistance from candidates for office; that envy, hatred, and malice pervaded the world of politics. Lord Liverpool would not meet Lord Wellesley; Castlereagh had grudges against Canning; the Regent himself indulged his pet antipathy against my lords Grey and Grenville, which unchristian feeling my lady warmly shared. He was even heard to say that he would rather abdicate the Regency than accept the heads of Opposition. Who was to take the place of

pliant Percival? How to form a Government out of materials which refused to combine? My lady being nonplussed, Sheridan was begged to suggest something, and counselled a coalition. There were certain of the actual ministers, he showed, whose devotion called for gratitude; the qualifications of two of an earlier ministry were indubitable; certain of the vindictive Whigs had powerful claims for recognition. The Whig party, however, rashly resigned their chance at this juncture, and flung down the gauntlet of war. Fulfilling a menace thrown out from time to time, they made serious preparations for trotting out the Dreadful Woman. Clamour is easily aroused by men who are not particular as to the means whereby they effect their ends. The case of the Kensington martyr afforded an excellent "party cry;" so Whitbread, Brougham, and subsequently Canning, brought forth the unsuspecting stalking-horse, and employed her grievances with the utmost ingenuity to stir up popular ferment.

By-and-by, the truth crept out as to the reasons for the Regent's vacillation. Men had long marvelled as to the cause which could induce *Madame la Presidente* to cleave so staunchly to Percival. How trivial a motive it was for resistance to a nation's will! An entirely new ministry would involve a new household. Were not two members of the existing household my lady Hertford's son and

husband? She had upheld Percival with all her might to suit the convenience of her loved ones, and now, for their sakes, she clung still to the cranky vessel. Thanks to her unfading influence, Lord Liverpool, who in general esteem was even less desirable than the victim of Bellingham, became Premier; and wiseacres wagged their head, sighing out that the Regent was unfit for his position, that such a scarecrow as Liverpool must fall within a month! But the pessimists were wrong. They were blind to the fact that the Commons would be led henceforth by Castlereagh, a man who, when previously in office, had been unable to work with his colleagues, but whose acuteness in the hour of need was, in conjunction with the astuteness of Metternich, to foil the later combinations of the great Napoleon himself. By his subsequent career he showed how unwise, a few years back, had been his expulsion from the Cabinet; for the stability which Liverpool's administration long enjoyed was due in the main to the energetic perspicacity of his more distinguished coadjutor.

It was fortunate for him, punctilious as he was about appearances, that his Royal Highness should have taken, not too late in life, to the wearing of a jasey. When perpetual youth is your fondest aim and ambition, it is well to know that, whatever anguish you may endure in the night-watches, the polished

cocoons on the wig-block are not suffering—that they will flourish for many morrows with the same unvarying levity of chestnut-brown and unfeeling tightness of curl. If we allow silver marks of life's conflict to appear on our temples and then suddenly bloom into aggressive juvenility, acquaintances will be ribald and laugh, and swear we look older than ever. But if, taking Time by the forelock, we pop on while really young an artificial thatch, we may calculate upon an appearance which is much the same for years, whatever the commotion in our minds.

My poor dear princely boy! I vow I was anxious lest he should not have been quite presentable when they came hammering at the door about that murder! He had had his fill of Lafitte, and too much of Weltje's goodies, and, doffing the jasey, had rolled his august cranium in a belcher handkerchief, and was composing himself to sleep while his guests disturbed the neighbours. He could scarcely have looked his best without wig or stays when messengers bothered at four a.m. with objectionable details; while as for my lady, she must have appeared a hundred at least, when she flew out of her room in a fuss and a frilled nightcap, and caught the influenza.

Oh, Florizel, beauteous youth, before whose magic fluting a whole dovecote of prize birds had fluttered and fallen, had you come to be the willing slave of this wrinkled old cat? Ah, well! Florizel, prince of

fascination, is now the Grand Signor, and in the middle of the night, upset by terror and too much wine, looked, I dare say, quite as old as pussy. But there was no mirror at hand! In the morning he was as right as ninepence; in his own eyes *sans reproche*. But he could not say the same of his daughter, who, heedless of prospective grey hairs, showed ominous signs of developing into a bore—a nuisance like mamma.

It came to pass that Lady de Clifford, governess, fell ill, being only mortal. The Lower Lodge at Windsor was a draught-trap, and so damp withal that those who were compelled to inhabit that nunnery were afflicted with chronic rheumatism. Lady de Clifford resigned her post, and went home to possets and warming-pans; and the young Princess, goaded by her mother, indited an epistle to the Regent, declining further thralldom.

Now, the Regent's temper was not improved by finding himself plunged again into troubles which he thought were passed. In all things that concerned Charlotte he was biassed by a suspicion—sometimes justified and sometimes not—that she was acting as the dupe of Caroline. He was ruffled just now by political throes, for every soul in the outer world was clamouring and reviling; and the ancient adage was realized once more, that troubles never come single. There had been a lull

from the persecution of the Dreadful Woman ; but, stirred again to action by the spiteful Whigs, she launched a thunderbolt—a letter of twelve pages, demanding impossible concessions : reception at Court, free access at all times and seasons to Charlotte, and so forth—a pathetic appeal, calculated to affect the ignorant mob who wist not the truth ; an ingenious document plausibly penned by some clever man, who, guessing that it would remain unanswered, published it broadcast in the papers. More scandal, more reviling, more draining of the stock of patience. Busy-bodies were as quick to point out as George was to believe that the two letters, simultaneously delivered, must spring from the same source of mischief. Was it not known that Caroline left no stone unturned to tempt her child to overt acts of rebellion ? She made no disguise of it. His Royal Highness gave way to a storm of rage. As to his wife's letter, he read it in the newspaper, but positively declined to touch the document itself, returning it unopened, and therefore unanswered. To gag Caroline was beyond his strength, but it was otherwise with a girl in her teens. What ! Was his own child, who was growing into a woman, to pass openly under the standard of the enemy ? Caroline might squall, and Whigs deride—that could not be helped—but the froward chit might and should be sat upon and crushed instanter. A will of her own, forsooth, and a desire for emancipation ! Ladies-in-

waiting, and an establishment! Not if the Regent knew it. Hoity, toity! Stuff and nonsense! Her papa would let her know that heiress to the crown she might be, and seventeen years old, but that she was subject to her father while he lived, however antique she might become. By his gods he swore that so long as she was single she should never have an establishment. Suspicion of the enemy at Kensington and infinite worry rendered her parent overbearing; he was too much teased, too furious to remember his own youth—how he had himself suffered from parental tyranny. Sending for my lord chancellor as a moral support, he posted down to Windsor, burst upon the astonished maiden like a bombshell, and rated her like an angry nurse. She was a fool, an idiot, a saucy jade! My lord Eldon, anxious to propitiate the reigning power, vowed—he was henpecked himself at home—that if his advice were taken, so perverse a minx should be placed under lock and key. This, too, in presence of the Queen—between whom and she there was bitter enmity—and all her cackling aunts; so loud and shrill an uproar that ears of tabbies were no doubt applied to every keyhole, eyes to every crevice.

Strange to relate, the only one of the party who displayed any dignity was the original aggressor. Charlotte, having recovered from her amazement, maintained a haughty silence, which her father took for sullenness. What she had ventured to desire was

not an extraordinary boon, she thought. At seventeen one may surely claim a little freedom, may even dream of balls and routs without committing sin. If it might not be as she wished, she must e'en obey, but she would never love her unkind papa any more—never, never, never! and as to grumpy old granny, she was a hateful harridan.

Everybody's milk of human kindness seemed to have turned, and Brummel, who pronounced personal abuse to be lamentably vulgar, took up his parable and spake. "It is humiliating," he said, "to trace the motives which have resulted in the loftiest tragedy to their first cause—the liver! The upsetting of that organ produces lowness of spirits and abnormal sensations of disquiet." May not most, if not all, crimes and atrocities, those even which have led to despair and revenge and murder, be traced to livers out of order? His Royal Highness's must have been in a dreadful state to make him storm and fume. Why not take a pill, and administer another to Lord Eldon?

Certain it was that the Regent had gone too far. How should he know how to manage damsels, or Lord Chancellor Eldon either? Perceiving his mistake after the first paroxysm of heat was passed, he strove in a measure to undo what he had done, by removing the girl from the Queen's surveillance and lodging her near himself. Her Grace of Leeds was to succeed my lady Clifford, with Miss Knight, an elderly blue-stock-

ing, and they were not to be called governesses. To this small extent the wishes of the maiden were complied with, but chance of future confidence was gone. A breach was dug between father and daughter which never might quite be filled ; and looking on the most amiable of men as a bully, she was afraid of him, and inclined to be sorry for her mother. Thus did the Regent find that he had to fight two women. Foolhardy wight ! for is not one woman more than enough for a regiment ?—and one of these, if obstreperous, was pure and innocent, sure of the public's suffrages.

Charlotte was duly installed at Warwick House, and, bursting with ardour and energy and suppressed sentiment, resigned herself as best she might to the monotonous existence of a novice. Although papa lived over the way, she saw little of him ; for he was guiltily aware of the breach, and sulky, as people are who know that they have been pushed by anger to commit wrong acts. In his heart he was sorry, but it is not the place of a parent to go humbly down upon his knees. The baggage ought to feel for him in his many troubles, meet him half-way, and forget his hasty outburst. But she was his own child, with the blood of granny flowing in her veins, and could be hard, and cold, and proud, and extremely undutiful, and meet him with a face of stone. He had good cause strongly to disapprove of those visits to Kensing-

ton, yet dared not, for fear of the outcry which would ensue, to stop them altogether. Prejudiced as they were, would people believe his story of a wicked wife and naughty child? Not likely. Exploding with resentment, he had made a lamentably false step. Now, grown calm again, how might it be retrieved? The knot was too difficult for Lady Hertford to untie, to whom he took all his knots; moreover, that astute person knew better than to place a finger between bark and tree. Dabbling in politics was one thing, meddling with the private affairs of a maiden who had a spirit of her own was quite another. But she knew that it is an ill thing for a strong-minded and healthy maid to feed on her own heart and nurse her grievances, and so she said, "Marry the girl as quickly as possible; get rid of her. Pack her off to the Continent, where she won't meet her mother. But, for goodness' sake, never breathe a hint that the idea came from me." It was a good suggestion, no doubt of it, and agreed with the feelings of the Regent, to whom it was naturally displeasing to have a bouncing daughter who looked five and twenty for ever before his eyes, whose presence shouted to all the world, "See how old my papa is, though he does wear stays and a jasey!" Do what he would, too, it would be impossible to delay her coming out for more than another year, and once *lancée* there was no telling what harm she might do by supporting the

Dreadful Woman. If she would only throw **mamma** overboard and frankly side with her father ! After such a fracas it could not be hoped. Yes ; a husband must be found who would bear her far away—to Timbuctoo or Madagascar—and meanwhile she must be severely repressed and locked within her nunnery.

What a dull existence it was that the unhappy Princess led at Warwick House, seeing no one but Miss Knight and her one comrade Abigel, and sometimes her Grace of Leeds ! Miss Rowe always came thence with a feeling of suffocation. The life led by her friend was so different from her own, in which, petted by all, triumph succeeded triumph, while as for coercion, she was as unshackled as a bird, tied only by caprice with regard to her duty to her guardian. My lord Osmington was not the man to have endured a girl who hung about his neck and wanted to be chaperoned. Abigel never troubled him in that way. She was always present—a vision of freshness—to make his tea at whatever hour he arose ; was *posée* as a woman of the world, who was not disturbed by its *faux pas*, but who, for all that, brooked no insult. The admiration she excited flattered his vanity, but my lord made no pretence to anything stronger than liking. It is probable that had she dropped down dead he would have rung the bell that the remains might be removed—have thought of her no more ; but while she was there, robust in health, pleasant to look at,

giving no trouble, her existence was a pleasure instead of a responsibility, and a comfort, too, sometimes, when he wanted a sound opinion. As he was too genteel to believe in a future state, so was he too much engrossed by the present to heed what might befall a little later, even on this sublunary planet. When a member of the Noah's Ark became too importunate, he gave a careless order to his major-domo, and the delinquent was instantly expelled. What became of the creature he neither knew nor cared. And so in a less extreme degree was it with Abigel, although she did not revolve the question sufficiently to realize the slight tenure whereby she held her place. He did not choose to consider what he would eventually do with her, and she with ingenuous trust avoided troubling him or herself on [the subject—sufficient unto the day, etc. She was a pretty girl who could shine at Almack's, win an easy victory over Pepita and Chiquita in a pitched battle on the rare occasions when they met, keep the lawless bloods who frequented Osmington House at a respectful distance, sing, dance, laugh, make herself brilliantly agreeable. Was not that more than enough for the time being? Her guardian's original intention in adopting Abigel was gracefully to repay a debt to Madam Smalley—a debt of many years' devotion to him and his, and lips discreetly closed. My lord nourished no base designs upon the girl, and would not have succeeded if he had. My

word! She possessed a faithful vassal in cousin Cyrus, who would have stood no nonsense; who if assured of something underhand would have brought his muscles to bear on the offender, however high his rank. The playful Newfoundland puppy had developed into a watchdog that barked warning now and then, and ungrateful Abby laughed; for she was so self-reliant and so utterly superior to a professional pugilist that the notion of being looked after by him was entertaining to a high degree.

So for the present all went well with Miss Rowe. She reigned in the palace of the Osmingtons, was fretted by no cares, and was privileged to enjoy the friendship of the heiress to the British crown. The privilege had its penalties; for Charlotte was full of jeremiads, deploring her position as impossible, standing as she did 'twixt Vice, scarce covered with a rag, and Virtue, austere repugnant. Mamma's gatherings were remarkable chiefly for unbridled licence; papa's cronies hiccupped broad jests till 'twas time to sink under the table in more decorous silence; granny was the incarnation of virtuous icyness in its ugliest shape. 'Twas singular, Abigel mused, that her dear Prince and his sweet child should be thus at daggers drawn. "If you only knew how kind he is when you rub him the right way! A stable-boy was dismissed last week for purloining oats; but his Royal Highness remembered that the lad's dead father was a faithful

servant, and forgave him straightway. And didn't he borrow eight hundred pounds, at heavy interest, when he was very poor, and slip out, in a plain frock, to assist an officer's widow? Rub him the right way, Charlotte, my pet; humour his little peculiarities. Myself—I'm fiery if crossed, and when I disobeyed, Aunt Smalley beat me! Rub your father the right way." But that was just the thing that Charlotte would not do, and she grew peevish with her confidante; for the latter, biassed of course, decided that while both were wrong in their hasty anger, Charlotte was the worst of the twain.

She was worthy of commiseration, poor Princess, though her comfortless bed was of her own making. Warwick House, her prison now, was a gloomy, tumble-down habitation at the end of a *cul-de-sac*. The rear of the premises abutted upon the yard of Carlton House, with which there was communication by a gate. Nobody came down the *cul-de-sac* but the butcher and the baker and the gouty old professors. Nothing was to be seen out of the back windows except walls and a narrow cat-walk, wherein two sentries marched and stray grimalkins gambolled. Here, gazing for hours on the edifying prospect, the girls gushed and sighed and chattered, the younger sobbing out at intervals, "Oh, Abigel, you lucky thing! Born of the people, free to do as you list! Who would be a Princess immured in a living tomb?" To which

the elder would reply, with soothing endearment, "Patience, my darling, since you won't be dutiful. By-and-by a fairy prince will come to slay the dragons, and emancipate the captive."

Miss Knight, the elderly blue-stocking, commiserated the condition of her charge, venturing to expostulate against a system that threatened to warp a vigorous mind and sour a sweet disposition. This was how a forward young woman of seventeen was used to spend her day. From eleven to twelve a sub-preceptor would read and expound a passage in the English classics; he would be followed by a minister of the Swiss Church with an hour of French; and he, again, by Herr Küper with an hour of German. Then would arrive a music-mistress, with instructions on the guitar; and then Ventura with his violin, and Vaccari with thorough bass, and some one else, who was a Spaniard, to teach the pupil the wild manner of playing, so much in vogue among the great. The prospect of the perambulating cats was varied now and then by a drive in a close carriage, with the blinds drawn, that its occupant might not be seen and applauded; and the evening until bedtime would be edifyingly employed by my lord bishop with a discourse on politics, or a couple of hours with a drawing-master. Heavens! what an existence, without mirth or sunlight—suggestive of bile and headache! No wonder the girl was driven to look forward

to the shady evenings at Kensington as a relief from dulness, although young Sapio did paddle with her mother's hand, and Captain Manby dine in boots.

Sometimes, by way of a change, the Regent, when specially chafed, would step across the intervening yard, and indulge his daughter with a diatribe against mamma. What did the odious woman mean by incendiary letters in the newspapers? What did she mean by the preposterous appeal of twelve pages? Who wrote it for her? Did Charlotte know; and, if she did, why didn't she use her influence to keep her mother within bounds? And so on and so forth, till the poor maiden cried her eyes out, and moped and became desponding. Under the grim circumstances, we cannot blame the blue-stocking for winking at sundry breaches of the ukase of close imprisonment.

If the weather was fine, Miss Rowe would come on foot, and watchful Cy would volunteer his escort, and be asked up to the drawing-room to amuse the recluse. With the naïve curiosity of one who belonged to another hemisphere, Charlotte would listen to tales of Cribb, of the Sprig of Myrtle's ambitious projects, of the impudence of the Pink of Bow. On her side, Abigel would hearken with a tolerant smile, then, with a contemptuous whisk, bid the narrator cease—much as we might order in a hurdy-gurdy from the street to amuse a child, and suddenly discover that the din was not to be endured. If Miss Rowe happened

to be in an angelic mood, she would delight her cousin by allowing him to explain his theories, permit him by posturing to exemplify the advantages of a left arm and leg properly advanced, and even waggishly stand up opposite, between two peals of merriment, and assume a correct attitude. "Reserve an easy flexion of the knee," she would say, in arch mimicry, "that advance and retreats may be made the quicker; see that your face makes a perpendicular line with the said knee, while the right leg, on the slant, strongly props the body, as does a beam a wall." And then she would break into a scrap of cymbal-dance, and sing a snatch of song, and sit down breathless, with a tinge of sadness, due to her cousin's calling.

Now and again Leoline would arrive from Kensington, under cover of night, with a secret message from mamma. And so it came about that the three comrades of childhood came together, after a lapse of years, at Warwick House, and wrangled and quarrelled and made it up, as they had done in distant Yorkshire. Though she had heard much of him from Charlotte, Miss Rowe was overwhelmed with pleased surprise when she looked again upon her cherished playfellow. Was she as changed as he, she wondered, and equally for the better? His ardent glances seemed to say so; and yet they meant nothing but a poet's blarney. How could it be otherwise, seeing how superior he was to her, for all her education and accomplish-

ments? How delicate were his turns of fancy, how beautiful his thoughts, how smooth his method of expressing them! Poets are born, not made; and when you stand in front of one of the rare genus, you are awed by his towering stature and your own dwindled proportions. It was in this light that Abigel considered Leoline, growing timid in his presence; then, angry with herself for being so, breaking forth into some whimsical *espièglerie*.

Cy and Leo could get on no better now than in the vanished days. The former disliked the page, and the latter knew it, and was nettled. They stood on the defensive; while coquettish Abby fluttered between, and Charlotte, looking out, as it were, from a barred window, beheld a glimpse of youth. It was a never-ending source of amusement to the Princess to mark the conduct of the three, while Miss Knight was busy with her tambour; for Cy's blundering, childish instinct of distrust developed now into fierce jealousy, and his gleeful cousin was charmed. The young pugilist beheld the slim proportions of the page with infinite scorn (which Leo returned with lofty disdain), and noted with kindling ire the undisguised admiration of his cousin. What could she see in the affected fellow with his stuck-up airs? That dreamy, far-off look of contemplation was assumed, to show how much finer he was than his neighbours, and set off his saucer eyes. Nobody was good enough for the jackanapes! How

silly women are, accepting ridiculous impostors at their own absurd valuation, while men can see through their smirks and grimaces as if they were made of glass ! A poet, indeed ! Pooh ! That sonnet, which he read to the infatuated ladies with the manner of a stage-player, was balderdash, for honest Cy could make neither head nor tail of it. All about buttercups and daisies and rubbish. As for Miss Knight, who set up for being blue and was no chicken, she ought to be ashamed of herself, squatting in rapt attention and admiring his insight into nature. What was a buttercup or daisy ? Too common a thing to find a place in the flower-market. Translate the occult language of the birds and plants forsooth ! These foolish women were mad, and would turn the fellow's head, who was conceited enough already. Cyrus quite writhed, and beheld himself, in his mind's eye, pummelling the affected ape on the turf of slaughter at Moulsey ; but then he checked his wrath, for indeed 'tis unseemly for the strong to smite the weak—they should rather be treated with contempt. All the three ladies respected Leoline ; that was the exasperating part of it to Cyrus. Abigel became subdued and romantic, with sparkling eyes and bated breath, when he read his poems ; Charlotte smiled glad thanks for a copy of verses—the trash !—given with a modest blush ; while Miss Knight, who ought to know better, descanted on smoothness of rhythm,

elegance of imagery, and finely chiselled features, till Cy could have pinched her with joy. Sometimes in his hearing—for Abby presumed to treat her stalwart cousin as if he were deaf and dumb—the young lady and her friend would carve out the poet's future—what business was it of theirs?—as they sauntered, in the cool of the evening, round the narrow prison-yard. "Isn't it too bad," impulsive Abigel would say, "that the young gentleman should be deprived of his own? How well a coronet would grace that noble brow!" And then she would turn red and laugh uneasily when Charlotte, for the thousandth time, promised to see to it some day; for was not a partisanship for Leo a species of treason to Lord Osmington?

When, long ago, she related that story to the Princess of Wales, she had no special cause for gratitude to him whom she considered a usurper; now it was otherwise. The young man's cause could not be won without serious damage, if not actual ruin, to her self-constituted guardian, who was unaware of the part she had already played in rescuing the lad from the smithy. It certainly was an awkward position for her, and she felt it to be so. What a pity that two masters cannot simultaneously enjoy the same property!

Abby's nature and Leoline's were so well adapted one to the other, that she felt drawn to him, as in the childish days when she wandered in the path-

less woods ; and yet her allegiance was due to Vere —of that there could be no doubt—and she would observe regretfully, “ I wish he had his own, though I would not strip my lord. No, Charlotte ; you are wrong about his lordship. He’s wild and eccentric, but not half so bad as painted. At any rate, he is kindness itself to me, and that should close your lips.” And then Charlotte would retort, “ A selfish kindness, since he is naught but selfishness. You are useful to him, and he pats you on the head as he would a spaniel. The time will come, mark me, when you will cease to amuse, and he will drop you. He abets my father in his follies, and I hate him, and so does dear mamma. Yes, I do, Abigel ; and so will you some day.”

Cyrus overheard the conversation of which this was the upshot, and dimples of satisfaction appeared on his round face, such as the conversation of the ladies seldom produced. Was the Princess right ? My lord, no doubt, was selfish, never considering the feelings of others, and as capricious as one of the other sex. The change that came to his cousin when she quitted Battle Magna had been an abiding sorrow, for it raised her to a higher platform. While he remained as he was, or even went down a step, as she persisted in declaring, she had bloomed into a lady of fashion, and was quite out of reach, save in the matter of humble devotedness and servitude. As a

lad he had nourished hopes, which, in spite of their changed position, lingered yet in his heart. What if my lord grew tired of his toy? She would descend from the pedestal, and he might hope on still, without the risk of a charge of lunacy. Oh rapture! oh delight! He was so enchanted at the possible prospect of such a misfortune befalling his adored, that, on their way home from Warwick House one evening, she could not but remark his elation and the beatific swinging of the lantern which he carried to light her steps.

“Good gracious, Cy; don’t walk so fast!” she cried. “How can I keep up with your great long legs over the sharp stones? I vow I will come in the coach henceforth, and you shall spend your time with your Cribbs and your Belchers and your Ranns, and the rest of your low associates.”

“Please do not speak unkindly of one to whom I owe so much,” Cyrus entreated, slackening his pace, and looking hurt. “Tom Cribb is an honest man and a gentleman under his homeliness; and so am I, I hope. If you don’t believe me, ask Lord Osmington. Should the Princess have spoken truth just now, you may some time or other have worse allies than he or I. Who knows what may happen?”

Abigel stood still in the road, her black eyes flashing under her silk calash. “For shame, Cyrus!” she cried, with warmth. “The Princess, poor thing,

is made suspicious of ill by her position ; but it becomes not you or I to speak evil of Lord Osmington. Your Cribbs, forsooth ! Horrid company ! ”—this with a contumelious toss of the bewitching nose. “ Lord Osmington is the best of patrons, as you should know right well ; for he supports and assists you in the deplorable line you’ve chosen, sorry as I am for that ! ”

Cyrus looked crestfallen, as he always did when those eyes of sloe flashed fire at him, and grunted under his breath.

The pair walked on in silence for a little, and then Miss Rowe inquired, glancing with scrutiny at her companion, “ You’ve got something unusual creeping about in that empty head of yours. Out with it, Cy. What is it ? ”

“ The Princess’s words set me thinking ; that is all.”

“ Thinking ! ” laughed Abigel, gaily. “ My dear giant Blunderbore, you don’t know how to think.”

“ I was thinking what would happen if it turned out true,” he persisted slowly, “ and wondering if ever—— Oh, Abigel, my dearest dear, I would you could look into my soul, and see how full it is—how full of love for you ! ”

The voice of her blunt swain was choked with emotion, and tears rose to his cousin’s eyes. No woman was ever angry because a man laid down his

heart for her to walk upon, whatever his station ; so this one wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and murmured softly, as she pressed his hand, " Oh, you poor, poor, dear, puzzle-pated, blessed Blunderbore ! Would you wish a young woman of fashion to mop your honour's nose when Feefofum has mangled it ? "

" You would not have me give up the ring ? " Cyrus cried. " What narrow prejudice ! I've a great career in store. The Duke of York said so when I beat Caleb Rann, Mendoza's favourite pupil, and gave me this hoop to wear. "

" Indeed, you've not many ways open, my poor Cy, of winning renown, " returned his cousin, saucily ; " so pray make no sacrifice for me. I read of your battle, sir, to my lord over his breakfast, and he was more mightily pleased with the account than I ; for he made money on you. Faugh ! what butcher's work ! You sent him flying through the ropes—a great hulking ruffian of the lowest sort, my lord declared—knocked him down like a ninepin, and hit him once when the wretch was on his knees. That was a cross, Master Cyrus. See how learned I am in your nasty jargon ! "

" But he was already beaten, " returned Cyrus, eagerly, " and I almost unscathed. Did my lord really say that Caleb was a hulking ruffian ? How deceitful he is, then ; for he has taken him in tow,

and employs him on the class of work which he knows I would not touch. In the lives of your grandees there are a thousand things to disavow, which cannot be done save through an agent."

"*Un spadassin*—a bravo!" Abby said.

"A bad fellow. Not that I'm envious," returned Mr. Smalley. "That is all on his side. There's room in the Ark for both; but his conduct to me's a riddle. A man shadowed by the gallows-tree, such as exist in all our great houses, worse luck! One who shrinks from no action, however base; who fears nor God, nor king, nor robin redbreast, nor a sword-thrust, nor a stick, nor Botany Bay."

"Quite eloquent," gibed Abigel, "over the vanquished. Is it not true that there were doubts cast upon your victory?"

"Have you not said yourself that my lord won his money?"

"Yes. But this Caleb Rann tells all our housemaids that he was not fairly beaten, and Monsieur Mendoza says so, too."

"They're liars, then!" declared the Sprig of Myrtle, touched in a tender place. "'Twas got up to oblige Mendoza, and Cribb and Belcher didn't like it, though I was indifferent; for Caleb is a swaggerer. We fought it out in proper style, two years ago now, and Ward, who was umpire, decided that it was fair. What more can they want? I might have hammered

him to pieces, but refrained, seeing how done he was. I'm sorry now, for courtesy is lost on such a desperado. 'Twas proposed that we should fight again, but I saw no reason."

"He thinks you are afraid; I'm sure he does."

Cyrus smiled and chuckled. "Never mind the vermin," he said, reverting to the subject which his cousin attempted to avoid. "Tell me now, here in the dark street, that if ever there should come a rupture——"

"I should return to Battle Magna and Aunt Pentecost," replied the girl, growing serious. "But there will be none. Good gracious! Cannot cousins commune cosily without going further? Who knows if I shall ever marry, and what does it signify? Why cannot one like a person and confide in him without his instantly babbling of orange blossoms? Pray, like a good Blunderbore, forget such nonsense; for we are quite grown up. What was funny in children is improper now."

Cy was discomfited; but made another effort as they reached their home. "Promise me," he whispered, "that you won't take Leoline."

"Now you become offensive," retorted the frowning maid. "Your silly jealousy makes you impertinent. Be sensible. Should it ever be as you say, which it never will, I shall owe to my lord an education such as places me above a pugilist. Don't deem me

unkind, dear Cy. I am very, very fond of you, so fond that I wish you were less free with those leg-of-mutton mawleys. Instead of cherishing impossibilities, be a good boy, and attend to Mister Cribb, who is such a gentleman, and some day you may reach the dignity of—owning a public-house!”

With a ripple of laughter, the roguish damsel sped to her own nest in the immense Noah’s Ark, leaving her big cousin disconsolate.

Marryings and givings in marriage. Abigel showed no leaning in the direction of matrimony; neither did Charlotte, whose engrossing thought was how to escape from prison. But with her fond papa ’twas otherwise. My lady’s suggestion blossomed and bore fruit. The Heir-Apparent set himself to find a husband for his recalcitrant prisoner, one who would bear her away from the baleful example and counsel of dear mamma. That was the chief point. For a time, at least, she must be withdrawn from England, to prevent the possibility of an alliance offensive and defensive between stubborn, wrong-headed Charlotte and the Kensington Megæra. The Queen was requested to chat of wedding-rings; the royal aunts, to extol the charms of hymeneal bliss. Again the Prince announced, with emphasis, that there should be no establishment without a husband to command it. But here, as usual, he was met with obstinacy. Less facile than he himself had been, Charlotte said she

would exercise a choice. The Prince of Orange was proposed—the very man. The Princess promptly declined the honour, stating that the destined *sposo*, whenever he did appear, should be her slave, not her father's. "He is so ugly," the pert miss added, "that when he comes into the room I am compelled to put up my fan." "Your slave!" somebody suggested. "Whoever you marry will be King and exercise control over you." To which she made retort, "A king? Pho! pho!—never. My first subject, not my king." Whereby we may conclude that the spirit of the prisoner was far from broken by the monastic dulness of her life.

Again to enter the arena with a chit! The Regent was aware that he could not drag her to church, but would not give up his game. Who would be the father of maidens? The effect of dreariness seemed scarcely promising. He would try the result of indulgence. For the future, Charlotte might draw up the coach-blinds and bow to the ravished populace, might even give some children's parties, and a hop for the upper servants. Select and painfully proper gatherings were organized at Carlton House, to which the Prince of Orange was invited, where all the cronies hovered in a circle on their best behaviour, and passed the bottle surreptitiously. Balls were voted too expensive and troublesome, and the Princess was bidden to assume a matronly carriage to suit a

new condition. She certainly must be married, her papa repeated; 'twas an imperative duty; but far be it from a parent, who loved her so, to attempt to force her inclinations. She was free to take any one she liked, provided he was approved by her father. Meanwhile, it was hinted that, unless she were quick about it, the days of the future would be more dismal than the past; that the blinds would be pulled down again, and evenings spent with old Vitalba, a polite but blear-eyed fogram. She knew what that meant; for had not the drone already taught her drawing with a stump burned in a candle?

Rather than consort for evermore with fograms, the Princess gave way; yielded to armed persuasion, got used to the sickly complexion of the Prince of Orange, and, there being no rival in the field, accepted him. But soon after she discovered the trap into which she had been lured. Orange was to carry her to Holland; she was to follow him, even on the march when he went forth to fight the Corsican. It was a plot to get rid of her. Why should they want to do that? If it was a duty to be married, it was also a duty, in one so highly placed, to learn to know her people. Papa could not well explain that his plan was not so much to rid himself of her as to divide her from her mother. Taking the bull by the horns, she cried aloud that she was tricked, that she had been teased into accepting Orange; would have nothing more to do with him.

He was thin and hideous, his nose was like a grass-hopper, his legs no thicker than tobacco-pipes. Letters flew hither and thither; letters to papa, letters to my lord Liverpool and the Chancellor; letters to mamma at Kensington, whom she would never desert by submitting to married exile. Couriers, messengers, pages, were continually on the run. They might strangle, beat, lock up, hunt to death the wretched quarry that had never done them harm; she would be upheld in all her trials by the support of conscious rectitude. It was perfectly plain now, if ever there had been a doubt, that papa was a cruel, crafty ogre; mamma his injured victim. Orange knew not what to make of the lively family into which he had been dropped. The Regent made lame excuses, swore that there never was or ever could be again so outrageously stubborn and hysterical a hussy; the public growled that their prospective Queen must not be bullied and coerced. The end of the year found them all plunged into a broth that was as hot and unclean as usual; and Brummel, looking on, wondered whose liver was deranged.

CHAPTER X.

DOWNHILL.

It was a pity the martyr was so little worthy of her daughter's championship. Her conduct was becoming so imprudent as almost to satisfy the Regent while it irritated him; and the hate she cherished for the man whom she called "Mrs. Fitzherbert's husband" grew daily in intensity. The usual evening amusement of the Princess of Wales, when not on the rampage or at Vauxhall, was to fashion a waxen figure with a pair of horns and a large stomach, and sticking it full of pins, after the superstitious manner of the *Moyen Âge*, to set it to melt before the fire. She prattled to her ladies of the "fat brute's" demise, which must surely be imminent after a protracted course of waxen hocus-pocus; discussed pros and cons as to a subsequent match with the lazzaroni, and graciously promised to continue followers in office if they would bow the knee before her love. Servants gave warning and fled, for no one could retain a character who remained in such a *ménage*; and when

they were gone she cursed their memories (the conversation of her Highness was freely garnished with a d——), calling them prim and strait-laced.

In March of this year (1813), the sword which she had held so long suspended fell, and was harmless and blunted by reason of delay. The garbled version of details connected with the Delicate Investigation of 1806, prepared by Percival, was disgorged upon the public—a version creditable to neither side—and people read “the book” with feeble interest. The events happened too long ago; besides, it was evident on the face of it that the account was doctored. Mr. Wortley got up in the House and complained weakly that the royal family was the only one in England that cared nothing for its reputation; a false statement, for the washing of foul linen became fashionable long since, being practised by a fair majority of the upper ten, who were too loyal not to imitate their betters. Ancient tales are tedious; but rumour began to whisper, to the delight of scandal-mongers, that another delicate inquiry was imminent, which would bring to light the mysterious doings at Kensington. If the wife was performing conjuring tricks to bring about her husband’s death, the latter was plotting to be rid of her by any possible means; the desire for freedom mutual. But the public mind, if callous to old scandals, was not in a humour to tolerate new ones; so, when the Princess rushed as usual to the

front and memorialized Parliament on the subject of her latest grievance, she was wisely dismissed with a hurried declaration that "nothing special was imputed." Of all things, she most detested vagueness and hushing-up. Beset by a diseased craving for notoriety at any price, she took an unhealthy pleasure in splashing herself with mud. It was vain for those who would befriend the unhappy woman to preach of dignity and reticence, for dangers narrowly escaped carried no warning. "Ministers wanted to gag her, did they? No, indeed!" Foiled in the attempt to raise a breeze at Westminster, she fell back upon the letter of twelve pages, which, bandied backwards and forward, had never met with a reply. Such a nice motherly and wifely letter, deploring a cruel separation from a darling child, whose education needed the finishing touches which only a mamma could give, professing a Christian anxiety about confirmation—the outpouring of a meek sufferer afflicted with a tender conscience. As we have seen, the exasperated husband refused to have anything to do with it. How could he cope with a vengeful fury who was so cunningly advised? As printed and published in the *Morning Chronicle*, nothing could be more sweet and fitting than this said letter, more calculated to put him in the wrong. Was it not aggravating to be denied the satisfaction of showing her up; of saying, "Look at the swarthy wolf clad in the wool of the

mutton?" Within the sympathizing circle his Royal Highness, as he fumed up and down, called all the Chinese lanterns to witness a terrible oath. *Coûte qui coûte!* He would unveil the dreadful female, sue for a divorce; he would have another inquiry, in which shuffling Grenville should take no part, and publish the result thereof. Sherry hiccupped that in squabbles with women men get their eyes scratched out. My lady was for letting things take their course. Vere murmured that there was too much of the Brutal about it, and too little of the Balmy.

A second inquiry was accordingly set afoot, but ministers, obliging enough in a general way, were peremptory in the matter of publishing. Public morals had already suffered grievously from the performances in the laundry, and the Opposition were as sharp as lynxes, ready to use any weapons. There was nothing for it but patience. If her escapades were left unnoticed, the Princess would plunge deeper and work her own destruction. Patience! The Prince's stock was not like that of Fortunatus, which, draw on his purse as he might, was never empty. What mortal could be patient under the effect of the enemy's tricks? It came out that the nice motherly epistle was concocted by Brougham and Whitbread, who thoroughly gauged the feelings of the public with whom they had to deal. Popular feeling was stirred in favour of the supposed writer, for sure none but a noble mind could be capable

of such edifying sentiments. It was possible, probable even, that the lady had long ago, misled by juvenile skittishness, been guilty of unwisdom, but the past was condoned and done with. Certain public bodies actually sent deputations to Kensington to condole with the injured martyr, and Charlotte was earnestly adjured never to desert her mother. In April, the City was successfully agitated by cunning Whitbread, and a solemn address was forwarded by my lord mayor, expressive of commiseration.

Poor Gentleman George, engaged in warfare with his daughter, unable to set himself right with regard to his wife, was he not in a sorry plight? How horrid to be compelled to hold his tongue, though possessed of such a budget as would have turned the tables, had he been allowed to use it! "Go on, go on," he grumbled ruefully. "You set up and worship an idol of your own manufacture. You don't know her as she is; I do!" And with this strictly private protest he was forced to be content, and carry his weight of trials.

But he was not going to be tempted to answer that hypocritical letter, to step into the trap prepared by Brougham and Whitbread. Nothing should induce him to do that, however much a deluded public chose to admire the effusion. So it flew about the town with an unbroken seal; was sent to Carlton House and returned with compliments; was despatched to

my lord Liverpool, then to my lord chancellor, who looked at it with hands behind him ; and the more studiously it remained unopened the more the martyr howled.

For a brief space Caroline was amused by the detonation of her thunderbolt, and gratified by the deputations and addresses. But constant change and pastures new were necessary to her unsteady mind. Brougham warned her of possible surveillance, explained that it was within the Queen's prerogative to turn her out of Kensington, where she had coals and candles gratis, and that a retreat might be selected for her of which she would not approve. Much as she loved notoriety, she disliked being dogged. If they turned her out of Kensington it would be a charming new grievance, but highly inconvenient. For two pins she would retire from the unequal conflict and leave England. True, she had worsted the foe in battle and inflicted festering wounds, but it was in the power of the enemy to make her extremely uncomfortable, and to that she much objected. Some people wondered what new bee could be buzzing in her bonnet ; others did not, for they could put two and two together. Beloved Chanticleer, the handsomest of lazzaronis with the throatiest of tenors, was—gone away ! Bribe by Brougham, whose interest it was for the moment to keep the Kensington sty tolerably sweet, the seductive Italian had left the country, and all the

fiddling of all the fiddlers was incapable of filling the void. Not but what fiddlers and squallers were legion—an army of mendicant Apollos. They were an engaging set, but had their drawbacks, as their hostess was fain to confess. For instance, they pocketed the cutlets and borrowed shillings from the footmen—ungenteel proceedings both. The dwindling remnant of respectable hangers-on began to be liberal of unsought advice, and her Royal Highness was too headstrong to relish unsavoury counsel. She had a way of saying, “By Gar, if I say I do a ting, I doot;” and she certainly did, all the more if people protested. Mr. Whitbread, who made very free, had the impudence once, before a roomful of people, to bid her cover her person, which was rude; while as for Brougham, he degenerated into a kind of dry-nurse. The attitude of the latter to the Princess and hers to him were whimsical enough, for each was always trying to overreach the other. Though he built his reputation upon the remnant of hers, he cared nothing for Caroline. The one seemed to think, “She may be useful to me;” the other, “He *is* useful to me at present.” So they masked a mutual disrespect with cordial and effusive greetings.

Even Leoline, whom she had dragged out of the gutter, presumed to take his patroness to task, and she resented the impertinence. What next! If he dared attempt such a liberty again, she said, she

would turn him out of the house. Poor Leoline! The position of a sensitive young man like him was indeed pitiable, in the midst of vulgar grovelling and pocket-picking, unblushing theft. More than once a surging disgust bade him flee away and take refuge anywhere, as his ancestor had done; but an uncertain sense of duty kept him in the slough, for he had not yet quite abandoned all hope of recovering his own, although he no longer talked of it. He was young and could wait, and was inwardly tempted to hold cheap a distinction which he saw so outrageously abused. If a man is no hero to his valet, 'twas permissible in Leo, who was behind the scenes, to condemn both royalty and peerage. What did he see of either that was captivating? Deprived of glamour, how little there was to induce a poetic visionary to hanker after rank! But he could not forget his dying mammy, who commanded him to take her marriage lines and claim what was his by right. From her point of view it was the distinct duty of the last of the race to make good his claim—for the sake of the dead and gone, if not for his own—to grave the names of the nameless on the roll of the illustrious Northallertons. To him how vain a task, how thankless, and how difficult! What a mockery to blazon the titles and cognizances of those who in life were paupers! 'Twas foolish of his mammy Naomi—a homeless outcast, who in rags, upon a truss of straw provided in charity, gave up her

breath—to lay store by tinsel baubles. How contradictory, too, was she—bidding him at one moment to make good his rights, then saying that by men he never would be recognized! Was it his duty to hearken to such babble? Might it not have been better to have disobeyed an idle wish at once—have torn up the marriage lines, gone with the stream? What good had come of his visit to Battle Magna? Apprenticeship to a trade which he was too weak to follow, then a plunge into a society that was repugnant, loathsome. By degrees, all personal desire to wear a coronet was waning. For the sake of the departed, he would be glad to have it; for his own, he cared little now, for his spirit was attuned to higher things. And yet how strange a chance that he should have become a member of the household of a Princess of Wales! Was this a first step hewn by Destiny? 'Twas impossible to tell as yet, for Caroline, save where her selfish pleasure was concerned, was slippery and wayward, given to promises which were not to be fulfilled. One thing was clear—by himself he could do nothing, for he had no money, no influence, no proofs except a shadowy report that was mere fable, and one bit of paper. Supposing his mistress were to supply the funds, where was he to look—where search to make his title good? Leo was not a man of action, one who loved fighting; but a dreamer, a philosopher, who preferred the contemplation of nature at rest, and the

construction of elfin bowers. What a man for such a task as that which loomed before him! Longing for meditative peace, he might not have his way, for the names of the dead seemed to his vivid and cultured imagination to be singing an upbraiding chorus, while, swept along as he was in the vortex of the Comus dance, he could neither obey the behests of the departed nor fulfil his poetic dreams. There was nothing for it but to put up with present disagreeables and wait, hoping that wilful Caroline would be impelled to take up his cause again some day and give him at least an opportunity of fairly trying his chances. Thus, perhaps, might the clamorous sighing of the dead be stifled.

Abigel watched her playfellow and was distracted by opposite conclusions. In her heart of hearts she was still ambitious for his behoof, and, inwardly condemning a sloth which so sharp-tempered a damsel could not understand, christened Kensington his Capua. The attitude of the ragged mountebank as he faced my lord in his cups was finer than this resignation. 'Twas she who had raised him to his present place, and it was ungrateful to complain instead of making the most of advantages. He did not like the Comus crew? Well, all the more reason to wheedle Caroline, for when he had his own he would be free to choose his company. Leo shrank by instinct from a knotty problem to which he saw no

solution; and Abigel, for her part, rarely referred to it, lest she should seem to plot against my lord. Taking a simile from the jargon of cousin Cy, she would have liked the post of referee, watching two combatants do their best, in both of whom she was interested. "My dear girl," the young man replied, sadly smiling, when one day she told him this, "in desiring such a contest you show little care for me. Possession is nine points of the law. My lord has the laugh on his side, and is like to keep it; for I am obscure—as nameless an adventurer as any of her Highness's following—and would very soon be beaten. In truth," he added, with a sigh, "I find it hard to care. What is the world, lovely as it is, but a vestibule? The sooner we pass on the better." To this Miss Rowe retorted, that if we are kept in a lovely vestibule it is well to be as comfortable there as may be. "My view of the world," she said, "is uncomely enough, but I have learned to make the best of it. My lord is no better than your Princess, but if well managed he is kind. I am compelled to look upon all sorts of things which I would prefer to have concealed; but, for all that, I take what is pleasant without making moan, or wishing that I were dead!" That must indeed be true, Leo reflected with concern. "You must see much that you ought not to see." His pensive face was clouded by apprehension as, clasping her hand, he whispered anxiously, "God pre-

serve thee from harm, my sweetest Abby. Pray that you may be steadfast. Yet why should I be alarmed? A sunbeam passes through pollution unpolluted."


This was quite of the heart-and-dart order, but you must not run away with the idea that the pair were falling in love. Leo was too conscious of his namelessness and questionable position—morbidly so, in fact—to desire to make matters worse by attempting to run in double harness. Good luck! What had he to offer to a maiden? Did not he hang completely on the caprice of the most capricious of women, who might at any moment thrust him forth into the cold? A pretty fellow to make love *pour le bon motif*! No, no! Ardent as were his tell-tale glances sometimes, he steeled his lonely heart against pretty Abby, liking the girl too well to wish so hard a fate for her as union with a waif. Miss Rowe, the successful superior lady of fashion, was quite above such fudge. If he saw too much of the dark side of royalty to care about a diadem, she saw enough of Cupid to act as warning against silken fetters. What she beheld of hearts and darts did not entice to imitation. Conflicts between her idol Prince and his *bête noire*; awful, soul-harrowing warfare, for which she was deeply grieved, between Charlotte and sallow Orange; rows, daily and hourly, of a kind which demand a veil between her guardian and his menagerie. Light flirtation had its charms, if frivolous and meaningless,

and was very pleasant, when she got the chance. What with the things she saw and heard among the *ton*, and what with the accounts she read each morning over a dish of chocolate, we cannot but applaud a sensible young person for soaring above weaknesses that compromise liberty. You may suspect that so audacious a vain creature will come to be punished, and, very properly, will singe her wings and weep. That for the present is in the womb of Time. The cronies—Vere's bosom friends—over whose festive repasts she chose to preside now and then, though irresistible devils in their own esteem, were not the men to make a breach in the bulwark of her virgin affections. How should they? At mid-day, when she saw the most of them, their hands were palsied by six bottles overnight, their tongues so furred that they could scarce articulate. Their brows thumped as if about to burst; and she, really superior after a sound night's rest and morning gallop, could laugh at their rickety compliments. To her healthy inexperience, Cupid was no pink-skinned boy of perfect symmetry, bathed in early dew, sweet with the scent of daffodils. He reeked of port and tobacco, lurched and clutched with fevered fingers, and upset his snuff-box in her lap. The only males with whom she was thrown in contact, who were not always recovering from a drunken bout or commencing to dive into another, were Cyrus and

Leoline. The former she patronized with careless condescension; he was of no account. The latter was a brother of lofty genius—an abstraction who descended from the clouds, as Moses from the mount, to deliver words of wisdom. Even were he to ask her to be his—which he showed no signs of desiring to do—how could she dream of prattling to him of the dearness of calves'-head, or what was to be done with the dripping? No. To her mind, unsophisticated with regard to genius, he was a being of higher grade, to be worshipped from a respectful distance. Therefore, so far as she knew to the contrary, the maiden's heart was an empty casket. She was a sleeping beauty, waiting for the kiss which was to rouse her dormant faculties.

But to return to a less pleasing subject than the working of a virgin mind. Caroline, with all her glaring faults, was not ill-natured, unless directly provoked; was endowed with a fitful glowworm sort of humour, that gleamed luridly out of a murky atmosphere. Of course she hated the coterie of Carlton House, individually and collectively; for who but they counselled the persecutions of "the brute"? Her fiddlers, she sneered, were no lower than maudlin Sheridan, or the lackey's grandson, or the avowedly vicious Vere. To please the coterie, she was shunned by peers and peeresses. What then? She would create a *noblesse* of her own. To this end, partly for

fun and to be talked about, partly because she knew it would annoy Lord Osmington, she began operations with her page. What a shock for Leoline, who wished to remain quietly in shadow till something tangible should present itself. Was the moment for which he had settled to wait, already come? Was his mistress, turning like a weather-cock, about in real earnest to espouse his cause? She gave orders to all and sundry that Mr. Jarvis was to be called Northallerton, and treated by the household with respect. The seal bearing the family coat—his mammy's only treasure—she hung by a ribbon round his neck, as a lady might adorn a lap-dog, and gave him such attire as befitted his phantom rank. On his next visit to Warwick House, Abby clapped her hands, and Charlotte said, while Miss Knight nodded approval, that fine feathers became him well. Not so Cyrus, who saw only another trait of arrogance on the part of the jackanapes, and who, when Leo held out his hand, abruptly placed his own paws behind his back, and, snorting, turned upon his heel. The ladies, he growled, must be demented so to humour a mere wind-bag: Abby might scold and stamp, but that was his opinion, and he cared not who knew it. Poor Leo looked terribly mortified and embarrassed as he hung his head; for, indeed, 'twas vastly absurd to be my lord and not my lord, to be decked out in gorgeous raiment with never a tester in his poke.



In her own domain the Princess was imperious and would be obeyed, so there was no use in disputing her whim. Were definite advantages to follow? Alas! it seemed little like it, for the time at least. Leo had cause to be dissatisfied with his mundane status, for Caroline could not be got to promise practical assistance; and the Comus crew cursed the daw in peacock gear, vying with each other in envy.

The most important result of the Regent's second series of inquiries into the conduct of his spouse, was a peremptory order that mother and daughter should meet no more, except at rare intervals in the presence of selected witnesses; and we cannot blame those who gave the order, knowing what now we know. Some of those behind the scenes said that her outrageous behaviour was the result of natural depravity; others, that she cast feminine decency aside merely to annoy her husband; others, that insane, her madness took the form of a perverse wickedness. This last was her mother's opinion. So seemingly harsh an order was sure to be made the most of by her party. More epistles in the *Morning Chronicle*; more speeches by Whitbread in the House. She posed as the guiltless one; and Charlotte, smarting under coercion, joined in the outcry. This was a fertile subject for quarrelling in all societies, and Cyrus did his best, for private reasons, to set Leoline and his cousin by the ears, when the trio met at Charlotte's. Abigel, biassed

by her friend, deplored the cruelty of her idol, which she was not fully prepared to justify; while Leoline, penetrated with disgust, could not bring himself to explain to two innocent young ladies the details of the Kensington *ménage*. Caroline, descending step by step, was going all lengths. Kensington was too public a place for the fully developed orgies of the Comus crew, so she engaged a deserted cottage, hidden away at Bayswater, whither she would resort, with a group of the Vauxhall fiddlers, unaccompanied by a lady of the household. It was to be a Trianon, she said, where she, like Marie Antoinette, could abandon the stiffness of state for the sweets of privacy. Ye gods! Stiffness had long ceased to characterize the proceedings at Kensington; but there were sentries at the gates, and housemaids who had eyes and ears, and she had cause to remember that, in the first inquiry, housemaids were conspicuous witnesses. So off she would go, engrossed by the new freak, to "*Trou Madame*," driven by the elder Sapio in a pony-chaise; and, having spent the afternoon in the secluded retreat, like an elderly Mary and Rizzio, she would come back, in the cool of the evening, thinking she had done something clever. Leoline never joined these parties, for they pained him, preferring to sit at home with Madam Ambrosia Cotton, glumly awaiting her return. What an existence to be condemned to bear! What a sickening sequence of degrading

scenes ! When the Princess came back from "*Trou Madame*," so soon as the ring of pony-hoofs was audible, forth from hole and corner would troop unbidden guests, in anything but wedding garments, and then an orgy would commence, with fiddling and squalling and whiskey-punch, that was sure to last till daylight.

Her Royal Highness called the proceeding a *diner soupative*, and her time was equally divided between gorging on her own account and calming the wrangles of her favourites. Mercy on us, what an eater she was ! "Une de ces femmes," old Sapio said, grinning like a hoary old baboon behind her back, "qu'il faut attaquer par le diaphragme ;" and well he understood his rôle. Sitting by her side, he piled food upon her plate, squeezed her fat waist, and, when the moment was propitious, babbled of little money transactions in which was needed a Samaritan. Among them, the fiddling satellites bled the poor lady till Leoline was scarlet with indignation. To satisfy their greed, her silver was in pawn, her jewels, presents given by the mad King to appease his conscience ; and yet they were not satisfied. The young man almost wished that his patroness might be placed under restraint, for it was shocking to see her devoured by this vermin, luxuriating in the Bayswater kennel ! Unless something was done soon, the Regent would be divorced by death ; for, while she gormandized, stout Caroline's

face grew purple, and she seemed on the verge of apoplexy.

We are nothing if not indiscreet, and, being curious to boot, will look in on the Comus crew. Her Royal Highness is in great spirits to-night, or is the look on Blowsalinda's face due to increased brazenness? Her little eyes roll in their deep sockets, and she shouts in a loud, hoarse voice for the goblet by her side to be replenished. There is little in the life of Caroline to make her really gay. When a new stroke is aimed at her by reason of her reckless folly, she assumes a sprightly air, which conceals the extreme of bitterness. As she came in, she received two messages that vex her soul, so she makes believe to be cheerful. One, for which she was prepared by Brougham, to the effect that, unless she changes her habits, she will be banished to Holyrood; the other from Charlotte, whom she may see no more, refusing a proposal of her mother's. She doesn't quite know what to make of grown-up Charlotte; for the girl admits that love for papa is *nil*, professes sorrow for the trials of ill-used mamma, and yet declines to be made a tool for the gratifying of the latter's malice. What are hollow professions but insults? Of what use is a daughter who refuses to take her stand and say, "I am grown-up. I am heiress to the crown. Papa and granny hate my mother and don't choose to recognize her existence in the family circle; therefore will I take

my mother's part, and refuse to appear at any entertainment except under her fostering wing?" If, taking mamma's advice, she were to carry out this principle with the firmness or obstinacy which she knows so well how to assume in her own concerns, in how awkward a predicament would the Court party be placed, and how overjoyed would be the Princess of Wales! There is talk of a Drawing-room, at which the young lady is to be presented. What an opportunity for the guiltless one to make irruption into the circle, and, standing beside her child, insist on being recognized! What a tableau! The epistolary thunderbolt would be nothing to it! The brute, discomfited, would be driven to hide his confusion behind a bumper of Curaçoa. But the minx, rich in protestations, will not help mamma to this splendid bit of spite—not even to be revenged on granny and the Court of frumps and tabbies. So, baulked in this direction, Caroline is evolving another brilliant idea, whilst gorging supper and imbibing punch, whereby she sees an ingenious way of stabbing the odious Regent.

There is to be a masquerade at Wattier's, given by the members of the club to the society of the metropolis in honour of the battle of Vittoria. The Prince will be there, and every one of any importance, as well as a large contingent of City magnates and their ladies, and a battalion of the *demi-monde*. What fun to take advantage of the mask, and appear

like a bombshell in their midst! Tickets need be no difficulty. The object of these meetings, these festivals of licence, where Pleasure, the "reeling goddess with the zoneless waist," reigns in undisputed supremacy, is that society may be as mixed as possible. We all know that. Why, Harriet Wilson, the notorious courtesan, is going as a lady abbess, and her two frail sisters, Fanny and Amy, as nuns. Would it not be fun, a screaming joke, to attack *incognito* the jaseyed Antinous, who so persistently ignores his wife and her effusions, where he could not escape, and tell him some home truths?

The Princess calls for another bumper, and cackles with delight at the idea; but it is not received with enthusiasm. It may be amusing to her; but the crew can gain nothing by it. What do they care about vexing the Prince of Wales? On the contrary, that hint of Holyrood is making many of them serious. Kensington is convenient, and "*Trou Madame*" has its good points; for in the solitude of its shady walks money can be enveigled from the pocket. But Holyrood! Banishment to a gloomy palace like a fortress, among a set of Puritans! Decidedly, her Royal Highness is going too far, even for the Comus following. Madam Ambrosia Cotton has just gained the speaker's eye, and is opening her thin lips to remonstrate, when her words are merged in a shriek. Whatever is the matter? "Something—under the

table!" she gasps; and Mrs. Sapio, vowing shrilly that 'tis nothing, looks foolish and confused.

"Oh yes; there is something horrid!" persists Ambrosia. "My satin shoe is wet. Northallerton, do seek something soft and hot. I took it for a footstool!"

Leoline plunges under the cloth, while the satellites look guilty, and presently reappears, flourishing in his hand—a goose! A complete goose, smoking hot, which Mrs. Sapio, like a prudent housewife, had whisked out of sight for removal later to her lodging. There is a pause of general confusion; for others, doubtless, have secreted something in ambush. The Princess gives a great guffaw, and is tickled; for the meanness of the petty lacy is in unison with her cynical mood. Not so Ambrosia, who exchanges glances with Leo. Really, this is worse than any tavern. She has borne much, she complains, but there must be a limit. The Prince of Wales is right, and the ignorant mob are wrong. They are disgracefully hoodwinked. It behoves those who respect themselves to beat a hasty retreat. She, Madam Ambrosia, one of the last to linger, begs with regret to state that, seeing the company her Royal Highness keeps, she must resign her post forthwith. And yet, even at this eleventh hour, she relents; for it does seem cruel to leave her mistress to the harpies. Much as the Princess resents interference, there is a

way sometimes, with cautious tact, of coaxing her past some fatal rock. Were she left completely to herself, she would play into the hands of her enemies; and Madam Ambrosia, who once was evilly entreated by the prim little Queen for indecorum of a pale kind is shy of the Court party. Besides, this very day, when she and Leoline were discussing their unenviable position, and wondering what to do, she had emphatically decided that both for the present must stand their ground and hold together. But there seemed no end to the freaks and whimsies, and this masquerade scheme was lamentably silly, if nothing worse—would bring all concerned into contempt. Both she and Leoline had often been dragged by Caroline to Vauxhall and elsewhere, when the latter sallied forth disguised to seek adventure, and had had much ado sometimes to bring her home unrecognized. In privileged circles it was well known that she was partial to such pranks. But to penetrate within the portals of Wattier's, the celebrated club! The more Ambrosia implored, the more confirmed became Caroline in her resolve; and it was at length reluctantly agreed that the adventure should be attempted. Madam Cotton stipulated, however, that Sir William Gell and Monk Lewis should be of the party; that the fiddlers should stay away, and that the Princess should do her best to keep her identity concealed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASQUERADE.

ALL London was agog anent the brilliant *fête* with which Wattier's was to amaze the town, and the gentlemen of the committee were driven out of their senses by the frantic rush for tickets. And no wonder. Did not all the smart young men in society belong to Wattier's club, at the corner of Bolton Street; all the marriageable young heirs to ancestral honours, and all the penniless younger sons, whose dowry was animal spirits? Were not the handsome Dukes of Devonshire and Leinster deeply interested in the success of the affair, and had not George Brummel himself deigned to superintend arrangements? Even the deities of Almack's had promised to come down from their high places for a few hours, and sanctify the ball by their presence so long as the proceedings were decent; for it is well for the great to unbend sometimes, lest they should snap for very stiffness. Outside the sacred walls of Willis's, Lady

Castlereagh, grandest of *grandes dames*, could deign to condescend. Esterhazy and Sefton could be amiable; Lieven a shade less haughty; Jersey could set aside her mock-tragic airs; the charming Cowper, flower of the *parterre*, delight by her ethereal loveliness. My lady Jersey had just introduced the quadrille into blue-blooded ball-rooms, having learnt that intricate and mazy series of leaps and gyrations from a refugee who had dwelt long in France; and had undertaken on this occasion to allow fashionables of the second class, who could never aspire to Almack's, an opportunity of studying the measure. Masquerades, at this period, were a species of carnival, in which all the well-dressed strata of society might mix. Even in some of the best private mansions invitations were distributed by tickets, which could be bought at the price of a guinea; and it is sad to relate that the cream of the cream kept gaming-tables in their drawing-rooms, where the unwary were speedily deplumed.

When a body of rich and fastidious gentlemen set about the giving of a *fête*, guests have a right to expect wonders; and the City cits and madams who, paying the price, found their way to Wattier's, were overwhelmed with astonished admiration. Of the immense suite of apartments, many of which were redecorated for the nonce, one surpassed the rest in tasty splendour. Lord Alvanley christened it the

Dovecote, in contradistinction to the Rookery hard by ; for subdued light and bosquets of exotic plants beguiled to flirtation, while softly whispered compliments were artfully covered by the rattling of dice next door. Nothing could be more complete, for the whole club was thrown open to the company. There were dressing-rooms wherein those who pleased might change or doff their disguises. There were whist and roulette rooms ; nooks where, pending supper, light refreshments might be obtained ; a splendid dancing-saloon on the first floor, draped with pale green satin and silver muslin curtains, illumined by large French globes tinged to a becoming pink. Every one agreed that Mr. Brummel had surpassed himself in polite taste. The refreshment department was besieged at an early hour ; for guests had started from their homes at five, and the crush was so great that it was ten ere many emerged from their carriages. The anxiety to be present was so intense, indeed, that not a few fair dames had their gowns torn from their backs, and returned afoot in rags, without seeing the *fête* at all. In the great entrance-room were grouped the members of committee, unmasked, clad in light blue dominoes, to receive the company ; while his Grace of Devonshire stood at the foot of the stairs to present each lady with a ticket for a raffle, to be drawn at midnight. Much as he detested crowds (at private parties he rarely went beyond the hall), the *arbiter elegantiarum*

was early at his post, with a word of commendation on this costume or that, which rendered its wearer happy. Now and then he even condescended with his own white hands to adjust details that had suffered in the squeeze; but so extreme a gratification was, of course, reserved for a favoured few, who boasted of the honour afterwards. In some cases he was compelled to condemn, as when he observed to an untidy wretch, with biting sarcasm, "Sir, your breeches are large enough for a family residence: is nankeen so cheap?" But Jove was, on the whole, benign, inclined to supernal leniency. Until very late carriages continued to rattle up St. James's Street and along Piccadilly; for dandies, who at Almack's were forced to be harassingly punctual—duchesses were reduced by the severe laws of that paradise to the level of charwomen—made the most of the freedom of the hour, and showed their independence by a stroll in Fops' Alley at the Opera, or a desultory chat in the round-room, before entering on the business of the night.

It was a gay spectacle, one of those fairy scenes of enchantment which are treasured in the memory. Lord Osmington was conspicuous for a display of jewels over his blue domino, borrowed for the evening from the members of the Ark, on the strict understanding that to-morrow he would add to the regalia. Some ladies, like the fabled ostrich, hid their features,

leaving their bodies bare ; for so thinly were they attired, that—

“ The welcomed eye perused the perfect shape,
And half forgot the intervening crape.”

It is wonderful to consider how many fat people there were in those days. Madam Coutts was rotund ; so was her Royal Highness Caroline ; while her daughter Charlotte at sixteen was overblown. My lady Buckinghamshire, who, with Mrs. Boehm of St. James's Square, officiated as hostess at this *fête*, was fat enough to earn her living in a show. Alvanley was like a bulging house that's just about to tumble ; while, as for Antinous and jolly Frederick—— But, bless me ! we must speak no scandal of Elizabeth, or our royal brothers either. On the other hand, some few people were preternaturally thin. Look at Sir Lumley Skeffington, clad as Hamlet, with his weazen old painted chin showing under the mask, and his feet strapped with diachylum to make them small, who creeps up the stairs like a fly that has outlived its summer. I vow you could sweep him away with a breath. And Edwin Lascelles, fashion's dearest sprig ! But that rollicking dandy has no time to put flesh upon his bones. Pulled out of bed and popped into his clothes at four p.m. by a faithful valet, brought to a dim sense of existence by green tea, put upon a horse to display a new marvel of Stultz's in the Row, he never has an appetite. The engrossing occupation of his

life is to gamble and to drink, and kill himself as quickly as possible ; while, as for the working of his mind, the tracing of the action of that recondite article is as difficult as to gather moonshine. Yonder attenuated dowager of Queen Anne's day, all buckram bones and bravado, who shakes like a skeleton dangling in Surgeons' Hall, is no other than Colonel Armstrong, the fire-eating duellist—a capital disguise ; while the slim gentleman whose limbs are concealed by a friar's robe, and who walks limpingly, is no other, some one whispers, than my lord Byron, whose “ Childe Harold ” has just taken the town by storm.

But the Prince of Wales and his party have arrived. York and poor Sherry are already very drunk, and cling, with effusive affection, to each other and the banisters. George is gloomy and ill at ease ; for he is terribly harassed by the hot bath in which he is floundering, and asks himself again and again, “ What have I done more base than other men, that every act should be cunningly misconstrued, and that my people should hate me so ? ” In truth, his Royal Highness has endured his full share of execration. The ingenious writings of Messrs. Brougham and Whitbread are doing their work well. The guiltless woman is commiserated ; the odious, abominable, selfish, wicked, hard-hearted, profligate Nero is cursed and loathed. It is generally understood, to alter an old adage, that a man may steal a horse,

while a woman may not look over a hedge. In the case of their Royal Highnesses it was reversed, but the cause thereof is clear when we come to consider it. The cronies of the Grand Signor were heedless of public opinion; my lady Hertford, though she preached prudence, was too proud seriously to consider the scum; every trivial act of the Prince of Wales was open to hostile criticism. The escapades of Caroline, on the other hand, were carefully screened, for purposes of their own, by a knot of clever men, who were quick to seize upon the enemy's blunders, and forge each imprudent act into a sharp weapon.

On account of his rank, the Prince of Wales had come unmasked to this *fête* at Wattier's; but the group that formed his party were skilfully muffled. Who could the gentlemen be? They assumed no character, and seemed to shun notice. Alas! unlucky Prince, to have arrived at such a pass! Since an idea had got wind—artfully propagated by mischievous Caroline—that Charlotte was maltreated by papa, the mob descended now and then to open menace, and the Regent was fain to surround himself with a humble but muscular following, much as my lord Bute was obliged to do some sixty years before. A pursey little gentleman in a Persian habit, whose sharp eyes glitter through a silken vizard, is Mr. Townshend of Bow Street, who watches over his charge with unflagging perseverance. Four dominoes dressed as pages hover

within call, who, if they were to unmask, you would recognize at once as our old friends Cyrus Smalley, Caleb Rann, and Jack Randal, under command of Champion Cribb. You may wonder at seeing the Sprig of Myrtle and the Pink of Bow behaving like an Eden lion and lamb, since, as you know, they have little esteem one for another. They have fought on the turf of slaughter, but no friendship came of the contest, since its end was so unsatisfactory that each claimed to be the victor. Caleb burned to fight again; but Cy, as he explained to Abigel, refused to give him his revenge, arguing plausibly enough that when you have given a man a thorough drubbing he ought to be satisfied. If you are to go on pummelling every thick-pated wight who will not lower his colours, there will be no end to it. True, the finishing touch had not been put to Caleb, but 'twas plain to be seen by all the Fancy that he was done for. But Caleb would not have it so. He had got rather the worst of it by ill-luck, not science, he vowed, and 'twas mean of Cy to refuse to renew the struggle. What was his reason? There could be only one. Cy had been lucky, but was such a cur at heart that he dared not face his foe for a second time. Thus decided Caleb, who accordingly looked down on Cy, while the latter treated the sneers of his quondam antagonist with good-humoured contemptuous raillery. Now, Tom Cribb has theories founded, albeit he knows it not, on rules of ancient

chivalry. That two men who have stood up within the ropes should sneer and snarl afterwards is very shocking. He insists, therefore, that abroad the rivals shall seem friends, however much they may choose to gibe in private. He insists the more on this, since they dwell now under the same roof, and have ample opportunities of quarrelling unseen by Corinthian amateurs. Rann is looked upon by all as the "coming man" of the Hebrew school of pugilism. He finds increasing favour, for some occult reason, with my lord Osmington, despite his rude manners and rough, uncultured ways; yet Cy is in no wise jealous. The twain preserve a species of armed neutrality. Each dislikes the bearing of the other, but assumes in public a civil surliness.

On the appearance of the princes the noise above stairs reaches its acme. Lord Alvanley proceeds to draw the raffle, and, squeezed well-nigh to death by the perspiring but eager fair, presents to each a trinket. "Sweet charmers, a little patience!" he cries piteously. "To be so close hugged would be delicious, if you would do it one at a time. Really, ladies, you push me off the chair, and if I go over the raffle must go too, and these pretty trifles will be broken. Ah, those brawny shoulders should be Cribb's. I'd know 'em among a million. Come hither, friend, and protect my weakness against the assaults of this bewitching army."

And now, while each examines her prize and wishes it was more expensive, a rumour circulates that something wonderful is going on in an adjoining saloon. A murmur of applause and clapping of hands. What can it be? Some fresh surprise imagined by the hosts. A rush, a wave, upon the crest of which the royal party is borne. Yes, a new arrival. What a strange conceit! How singular a fancy! My lord Osmington has cleared a space, and announces with mock ceremony, "Her Majesty the Queen of all!"

A lady enters, simply draped in white, wearing a mask fashioned like a skull, round which is wreathed a garland of primroses, while from her waist depends a row of poppy-heads. All gather round, chattering like pies, seeking to penetrate the new-comer's identity—Persians, clowns, watchmen, bacchanals. It's Miss Bellamy, the heiress, some one suggests. No; she is taller; her waist not quite so slim, her skin so brown. Whoever she may be, the *incognita* is young. Look at the shapely arm and tiny feet and swelling bosom. Be she beneath the disguise a pig-faced lady, her figure, if *petite*, is enchanting. The company vie with one another in proposals for her hand. "I've stared Death in the eyes a thousand times," an honest tar declares, "and am not afraid to grapple with thee." "Come to my arms, my dearest skull; I've fought thee many a time," cries one in a crusader's habit. "Nay, try me," a Methodist parson whispers;

"for I've slept on a bier this six months, with crossbones for a pillow." "You're very like Yorick; his sister probably?" says he who is attired as Hamlet. "Dread Queen, I'm pupil of Gall and Spurzheim," bawls another; "let me feel your precious bumps." "Sport a toe with me," murmurs a seductive friar at her elbow. "Never, Lord Byron," retorts the stranger, speaking in accents evidently feigned. "Have you not desecrated the majesty of Death a thousand times? You'd place my skull, bumpered with blood-red wine, on your convivial board."

The Prince of Wales, recovering somewhat from his gloom under influence of noisy mirth, admires the dimpled arms and shapely form in its simple robe, and says gallantly, "In spite of you, I seem to know your voice. I've seen that waist before and loved it. Who, having seen, could refrain from adoring such a figure, such feet and ankles? Let me offer to your tombship a pinch of fine rappee."

To which the stranger responds with a saucy curtsy. "A gift? My word! Surrounded by diamonds of purest water; a princely present. Yet will I none of it. Being of the people, 'twere wise in me to leave snuffing and kindred accomplishments to ladies with a dozen quarterings. Diamonds rise from womb of earth like demons to lure astray poor guideless mortals ere I send them thither. What to

she who rules the grave are the baubles sprung from thence ? ”

“ I abhor death ! ” murmurs the Regent, shivering.

“ Why so ? The worst of death is the being a corpse, and how short a while is that ? When the horrid thing is put away, and dust is dust, can we not etherealize and feel the beauty of silence and of sleep ? ”

“ Neither silence nor sleep are here,” interrupts the Regent. “ Diamonds are naught to you, no doubt, with such a pair of eyes as pierce those crape-dimmed sockets. Who are you ? Tell me.”

“ Sober talk befits not your present mood,” laughs the sprightly fair one. “ Come, sir, we will dance. Say,” she proceeds with accent and gesture mimicked from awful Siddons, “ will your Royal Highness leap with me, on the light fantastic, through the mazy dangers of the new quadrille with the agile boundings of the fawn ? My lady Jersey, summon your array. The Queen will perform *gambadoes* with the Regent.”

His Royal Highness, wondering who the girl can be, agrees. Those who are sufficiently instructed take their places, while Lord Osmington, in huge delight, bawls, “ ’Fore Gad ! dash, dash ! she’s splendid, on my honour ! ” The City madams gather round with eager curiosity, which speedily gives place to awe. A company of noble dervishes ! Sure they must have double joints in ankle and instep to skip with such

nimble jumps! The high-flown caprioles that distinguish the first performers seem the result of untried strength and unaccountable, irresistible flights of spirits, like the gambols of foals in a field. The Duchess of Bedford's *pas seul* compels applause, which fires her partner to rashness. The eyes of London are upon him.

Heedless of fleshly drawbacks, Lord Alvanley springs into the air like a sportive rhinoceros, attempts a *glissade*, and, with a thump like a stroke on the big drum, measures his length upon the floor. The *parquet* is as stout as he, and bears the shock. My lord, as brave as erst before the French, is up again in a trice, smiling with confidence; redeems his Terpsichorean character by a prodigious *pirouette*, and is listening to the congratulations of his friends, when Brummel whispers derisively, "What a fool at your age to attempt an *entrechat*!" To which the other responds over his shoulder, "Too old am I, upstart? Not too old to blow out your brains, you mongrel puppy, if I had not abandoned the duello."

Upon this the Regent, who is himself in the act of performing miraculous feats, cries out, "Come, come, keep your tempers! Alvanley, don't quarrel about nothing; you know you haven't a leg to stand upon."

And so an incipient fracas is turned off with a jest, and all are as merry as fleas.

"Why did you select so repulsive a disguise?" demands the Regent, between two graceful leaps.

"By way of contrast, perhaps," laughs his partner.

"Beneath that waxen horror I know that you are beautiful," sighs the Prince of Wales, with the fascinating manner which means so little and has undone so many. "I claim your hand for supper ; no refusal. We are woman's willing slaves, but slaves must not be exasperated, you know. At supper, according to rule, I've a right to beg you to unmask."

"Is it wise to be inquisitive?" replies the mysterious lady. "I have told you that I am one of the people. How can it signify, then, to your Royal Highness what my face is like? What is the perfect oval of the loveliest face but muscle and fat, which should appear as beautiful on the white breast of a plump chicken? And how vague a thing is beauty! By what inherent principle should a mouth three inches wide be condemned to ridicule, and a nose with a superfluous bulb be looked on with disgust?"

"A fair philosopher," cries the Regent. "Demmy, but the jargon adds a piquant charm to grace. Take care, lest I fall seriously in love."

"What then, pray?" gibes his partner. "Are you so irresistible? It takes two to carry on a love-passage or a quarrel."

"Could you not love me, then?"

"You!" cries the lady, clapping her hands with glee. "I am in my teens, and you have a grown-up daughter. *Mille remerciements!*"

The colour flushes on the Regent's cheek, and he is silent; and his partner, perceiving her shaft to have been too pointed, lays a caressing hand upon his arm and murmurs gently, "Sure you are not annoyed that I should remind you of your daughter? Charlotte is a sweet instrument, if you knew how to play on it. I know both her and you, and love you well, as an honest woman may love her prince; and it pains me that, misled by evil counsellors, you should do yourself injustice."

George started. "Who are you?" he inquired, with a touch of haughtiness; "and what do you mean?"

"I am a reader of thoughts. You are bent on shattering a fine nature and forcing a girl into an odious marriage. Remember your own!"

"My daughter is stubborn and headstrong and disobedient, and must be trained to better things, as we break a restive horse."

"To tune a harpsichord, do you rend its strings?" inquired the *incognita*. "You complain of having no fitting object in the world—I've often heard you say so. I give you one! Play upon Charlotte with light and tender touch, so shall she give forth harmony instead of discord."

A stout lady had, for the past few minutes, been hovering behind, attired as a sultana in a yashmak and heavy veil, and now she put in her word with

a sharp sneer. "Ha, ha!" she said in French, "shall a fat old bear jump upon hot bricks with light and tender touch? *Fidonc!* he keeps all his tenderness for other people's wives."

The Prince of Wales recoiled. Being himself unmasked, who was this who could make use of the vizard to stab in the back like a bravo? In figure, she was like my lady of Buckinghamshire; but that lady's French was limited, and, besides, she knew better than to presume. He turned to reply angrily, but the aggressive stranger was gone, lost in the crowd. Lord Osmington passed by, his brow furrowed, his features distorted by passion. "Who is that woman in a veil?" cries George. "How the devil should I know?" retorts my lord, with scant courtesy; and he, too, is gone, sadly preoccupied, muttering between his teeth as he shoulders his rude way—"That reptile here? He shall rue his insolence." The Prince of Wales did not hear a tall thin woman say to her companion, "Northallerton, my dear, escort me to the tea-room," or he might have named the bravo who hid herself behind the vizard. The unseasonable interruption had recalled the spirit of gloom that brooded over the Regent when he arrived.

"Well, never mind Charlotte," he says to his partner, with a bitter laugh. "She's an ungrateful minx, who must be taught manners. Tell me what you meant just now by saying you could not love me;

I thought that every one could pretend to love a Prince of Wales. At all events, you could let me love *you*, surely? Of every pair of lovers, you know, one is at least half passive. Remember the proverb, 'De deux amants, il y a un qui baise, et l'autre qui prête la joue!' All women have their price, and men, too, for that matter. Some are rather expensive, that is all.'

"Oh, don't," implored the wearer of the sepulchral mask. "It hurts me to hear such coarse wickedness from *your* lips!"

The Regent scrutinized his partner closely, for there was genuine pain in the speaker's tone, and said, after a pause, "Do you know that you are really interesting? Who is there that cares, except for the purpose of abuse, what I do or say? You are going the right way to make me love you."

The lady's bosom heaved, and she said hurriedly, "No, no. The dance is over; please leave me now."

"If you so order it. But I claim your hand for supper, and will see your face."

My lady of Buckinghamshire and Madam Boehm, so placid usually, were in terrible excitement and fluster, for an awful truth had burst on them. In the second dancing saloon a mazy waltz had been started, and two large personages gyrated like teetotums in the middle, to the amusement of the other guests. The female one was thickly shrouded in a veil down to the waist, below which her vast proportions were

tied, as it were, in a tight bag of skimpy dimensions and exceeding shortness.

After gazing for a moment at the curious spectacle, a thrill passed through my lady Buckinghamshire, and she ejaculated unconsciously, "Only one woman in all the world could wear such wrinkled stockings and untidy shoes! But she would not dare—it would be too frightful!"

"She would, and has," retorted Lord Osmington. "The entire crew are here, no doubt to make a scandal—even that beggar's brat who has' the impudence to call himself Northallerton. But I've made my arrangements to settle his goose, the insolent, lying impostor!"

The hostess cared nothing about the beggar's brat, but she saw looming a dreadful scene, for which the Regent would hold her responsible. Those curiously wrinkled legs were Caroline's—there could be no doubt of it. That she should choose to frequent public revels at Vauxhall and elsewhere mattered not, but to force herself thus into an assembly honoured by the princes! My lady Buckinghamshire beheld the lowering thunder-cloud with consternation, and, shuddering all over, sought out Madam Boehm. What was to be done? The princes could not be hustled off with the excuse that Guy Fawkes was in the cellar; no more might Caroline—since there must be an object in this escapade—without screams and shrieks,

which would inform the Regent of her presence. At supper she would unmask. Yes; she was capable of it. The obese skeleton would come out of its cupboard; and what then? It would not bear thinking of! Neither hostess chose to peer so far behind the terrible veil. At that supreme moment of imminent peril, my lady Buckinghamshire, the best-natured woman in the world, could have assassinated Caroline with joy. But how idle it was to consider the impossible! What was the use of wishing for a sack to pop over the head of the sultana, pending an operation with a bow-string in the dressing-room hard by? What did my lord Osmington suggest? There was nothing to be gained by scowling and uttering anathemas against a beggar's brat. The creature in the yashmak was really and truly the Dreadful Woman in the flesh. Did Lord Osmington realize that fearsome fact? It was—there could be no doubt of it.

Yes; my lady Buckinghamshire was right. The sultana was indeed Caroline, who had carried out her scheme. Leaving Kensington Palace by a private wicket, she had actually walked, with Leoline and Ambrosia Cotton, to the Albany, and, changing her dress in the apartment of Sir William Gell, had proceeded, still afoot, to Wattier's, where, showing tickets, she entered unopposed. "How stupid of the reception committee not to have marked those stockings!" sighed

the hostess; "but men are so blind in the matter of dress, and so lamentably wanting in resource!"

There she was—the past may not be undone. How to get her quietly away? The reception committee were called into conclave, and looked aghast. Lady Buckinghamshire could only think of the bow-string, and Madam Boehm of prussic acid. How unpractical and impossible! Would no one give sensible advice—something that might be followed? Yes; my lord Osmington could and did, so soon as his attention could be drawn from private grievances. Mr. Whitbread was sure to be at the Cocoa Tree, close at hand; he always spent his evenings there, and would see the necessity of interfering, to stave off a threatened something which all parties would regret. From every one's point of view, naught but harm could be anticipated from the continued presence of the Princess. Mr. Whitbread, like the accustomed keeper of some wild and dangerous animal, would come and coax her away. She would wag her tail when he put up an admonitory finger, and follow like a meek lamb, instead of biting like a wolf. Really Lord Osmington was not so stupid, after all. He must do his spiriting quickly, though, to prevent a catastrophe. Calling Caleb Rann to him, he went off to the Cocoa Tree, and, conversing eagerly with that satellite on the road, gave him secret instructions, which boded no good to the beggar's brat. Meanwhile, the hostesses

and the gentlemen in blue dominoes watched the menacing thunder-cloud, and prayed that it might not burst.

Miss Rowe, in the whimsical character she had assumed, was a great success, and amused herself vastly, playing her *rôle* so well as completely to baffle Cy, who was not sharp in the deciphering of riddles. She nearly drove him mad by dark warnings anent her own flirtations with a certain page attached to the Princess of Wales, calling on Mr. Smalley, as a relative of the coquettish delinquent's, to keep her in better order.

"Do you know," she hinted, "that the froward baggage has actually received tokens of affection from an august personage? Give her a good lecture, Mr. Smalley, and see what comes of it. What? You would not dare? Pooh! You've no notion how tractable she is under the domineering crust. Tell her roundly that you won't have such goings-on, and mark how she behaves."

"She racks my soul," groaned the despairing swain, "and heeds me no more than a fly. Were I to take too much upon myself she would box my ears, as indeed she has done often enough already."

"And you are so spiritless," scoffed the mischievous maid, "as to hanker after a heartless bit of goods who descends to violence? Fie, you hulking Romeo! Women folk are strange cattle, and like men who beat

'em; not such as submit to beatings. Give her a sound slap, and she'll adore you."

"She's not heartless, and I'd like to see the one who would raise a hand to Abigel!" cried Cyrus, fiercely, knitting his brow and clenching his great fists; and Miss Rowe chimed her rippling bells of silver merriment at the look of shocked distress which spread over her cousin's visage.

She danced without flagging, but could not satisfy the long list of suitors who pressed around to claim a turn at the waltz. If Cy failed to recognize the accents of his goddess under an assumed voice, Leoline was more clever, and to him in private she confessed her identity, promising a dance or two after supper, if he would wait so long. Of course he would wait till duty called him thence, but what his duty was the deponent did not say.

While the committee were in conclave, and Vere was at the Cocoa Tree, the wearer of the yashmak was preparing for a *coup*. Biding her time, she suddenly intercepted the Prince of Wales in his pursuit of a neat-ankled mask, and, speaking still in French, begged his arm for a promenade. Impatiently he waved her off, and as he was retreating, she hissed into his ear, "No good! That girl is honest, and will want to go to church. How may you do that, having two wives already?"

"Madam!" he stammered.

But she continued hoarsely, "Yes; two wives—a courtesan and a princess. You've broken the heart of one, and earned the hatred of the other. Is not that sufficient?"

The Regent grew livid with rage, and turned on his shrouded accuser. "What and who are you?" he gasped. "I will know, if I have to tear off that veil!"

"You are villain enough to do it," retorted the sultana, crossing her arms. "Of what are you not capable—you who persecute your second wife, and hate your child because she will be your successor? *Mon Dieu!* your crimes would make a charming catalogue—comrade of harlots, bigamist, seducer, adulterer, perjurer!"

The Regent was so transfixed with amazement that he stood undecided for a moment, with fallen jaw and pallid countenance. Then, anger surging back into his brain, he turned from the tall figure, which stood motionless as if tempting him to strike, to seek the blue dominoes, and demand an explanation of the studied insult. The first he met was Brummel, who, fatigued with unwonted condescension, was bored and out of sorts.

"There's a woman here," gasped his royal master, "or a man in woman's clothes, who, under cover of a mask, has said things that—that pain me more than I can say. I insist on your learning who it is at once."

"A joke, I suppose," yawned the beau. "Time was when your Royal Highness was not so scrupulous about jokes—at other people's expense."

"Brummel," said the Prince, with a frown, "take care! I have just and serious cause to be incensed. You have hitherto been permitted unusual licence; do not let me repent it."

"If a woman goes too far, it becomes a man to forget," returned the censor. "You've often been too far yourself, which was vulgar, since your victims had no alternative but to grin while being sacrificed. Is it your turn now to wince? Remember Patriarch Norfolk, whom you made dead drunk while bystanders cried shame!"

"I was a boy then," sighed his Royal Highness. "Silly enough, God knows—guilty of the crime of being incurably happy. How long ago that seems!"

"And will be a boy till as bald as Methusalem, under that chestnut wig."

"Brummel!" cried, again in warning, the justly offended Regent. "What is the matter with you to-night? She insulted me, I tell you; dared to call Mrs. Fitzherbert— There, there! I cannot say how shocked I am."

If Brummel had not been sleepy and perverse, he would have seen how moved his master was, and have pulled up in time; for the sultana had touched on the one theme which, to his honour, was ever

sacred to the Prince. In sooth, the beau was foredoomed—swept like a ship upon the reefs. Unluckily for his future comfort, he gave way to another yawn, followed by a smirk that conveyed volumes, and said, “How different things are in different ages! In old times the Pharisees used to make ’em wear a special dress; live like pariahs, apart from other women: now we give ’em palaces.”

The speech was foolish. What could have impelled a man, usually so punctilious, to fling a stone at the poor lady for whom in general he professed pity? He never knew himself, but laid the blame, in later days, on a liver out of order. Certain it was that he in turn had gone too far—had touched the tender place in a way that might never be pardoned.

The Regent, too furious to trust his tongue, moved away, without another word, to follow his trail of vengeance. How hard to be a prince, to be unable to unbend without dread of impertinence to follow! In how many freaks of licence had Brummel been permitted to indulge unchecked; how many breaches of etiquette—nay, of common civility—had been condoned; and now, in a case of serious moment, instead of showing zeal in his patron’s cause, he could only yawn in his face and turn the arrow in his wound! “Brainless clothes-peg!” George muttered, in high dudgeon; then ceased, for his attention was riveted by a circle of blue dominoes, who were standing in a

side corridor whispering, with heads together, like so many witches at a sabbat, too absorbed to notice his vicinity.

"She's gone! Thanks to the Lord!" puffed Lady Buckinghamshire. "Never had such a thrill in all my life. Sure there'll be grey hairs in my noddle! Fancy the pot and the kettle in the same room! 'Twill be weeks before I get over it. Whitbread—bless him!—led her away by the hand, and popped her in a coach, so none will be the wiser. What a mercy!"

"I fear she's done damage of some sort," chimed in Mrs. Boehm, wagging the edifice of feathers that crowned the tower on her head. "Her pig's eyes were too bright, her spirits too jubilant. I sent Madam Cotton after her, and she clamoured for her page; but he was left behind. Not that that matters. He's a pretty fellow and harmless, and will find his own way back to Kensington."

The Princess herself—the Dreadful and Never-to-be-sufficiently-detested Woman! She! How infatuated and purblind not to have guessed it! And yet, who would suppose—— But, where she was concerned, what was it not justifiable to suppose? The Regent, brimming with exasperation, welling with pent-up spleen, pounced on the circle of blue witches, and rated them while they cowed. Friends, quotha! enemies travestied, not to have defended him better.

Knowing what they knew of the Megæra—the trinity of furies rolled into one—why did they not throw up earthworks, dig moats, establish ravelins and counter-scarps?

“In sooth,” murmured deprecating Lady Buckinghamshire, “some one should have recognized her stockings.”

“Ay, and her shoes,” echoed Madam Boehm.

“What summer-day allies!” pursued the relentless Prince. The mob might hoot; that could not be helped. But here, in these elegant green-satin saloons, where he had confidingly and blindly trusted himself, a bidden guest! Must he lock himself, for the future, in a single chamber of the teapot sanctuary, and, like a condemned felon, see no face but one, for fear of outrage from that woman? If only Percival had been spared, the tangle in time would have been cut, the Benedict released from bondage; but no! He was gone, and none were left who cared for any but themselves—not even for themselves, the selfish creatures, for they could not see on which side their bread was buttered. Carlton House should be closed to all, every one of them; that was flat. The palace should be shut up. Its master would live at Brighton altogether, with the Hertfords, his only real friends. Where was Yarmouth? Had he been by, such a *contretemps* would never have occurred. Thus the Prince till out of breath. The circle of dominoes hung

their heads contritely, bending before the storm. They were very sorry. "No one could have foreseen the irruption of the *bête noire*," they trickled out in abject undertone. The more his Royal Highness bellowed, the sooner would the hurricane pass over and the sun shine forth again. Only Sherry waking from a drunken doze, with glazed eyes and sodden brain, suspecting that something was amiss, tumbled into the breach with ill-timed joviality; and the Prince, longing for opposition, fell on him tooth and nail.

"Hold your tongue," he roared, "you dirty sot! But for your seat in Parliament, your head would be under water, your pocket full of writs. You are the worst of the bunch to whose pernicious counsel all my woes are due!"

He is a fool who strives to argue with one in a passion, since rage is blind and cruel, and goads the tongue to form harsh words which may never be unsaid. But to be taunted with debt by the Prince of Wales, to be told that the counsel of the faithful one was pernicious—that was too much for intoxicated Sherry, who, gathering up his shreds of tattered dignity, addressed his master.

"Princes have no memory," he whimpered. "Who but I protested against that ill-omened match, declaring that your father was deceiving you? For you I've dragged myself through all the filth of the *cloaca*, and what is my reward?" The poor fellow's long-

smothered heartache broke into incoherent words, and he fairly blubbered, rubbing greasy tears with dusky fingers. "Put not faith in princes!" he hiccupped. "If I'd served my God as I have served my king—no, I mean my prince—I should have been in office now!"

"You in office! You—whose father was a weather-cock, whose mother a chameleon!"

"What?" shrieked Sherry. "You doubt, I suppose, my political integrity?"

"Political fiddlestick!" retorted the Regent, annoyed at being dragged into a futile passage of words before listeners.

"At all events, I never *ratted*!" returned Brinsley. "A Whig I was born, and a Whig I'll die. You've had my life-blood, turncoat; squeezed out my juice like an orange; and now, no doubt, you long to give my Naboth's vineyard to a Tory. Very well, Jugger-naut. To meet your wishes, I'll retire from Parliament, since I cannot change my colour, any more than an Ethiop, to please you. When I am completely ruined, perhaps you'll be satisfied?"

How was so rambling a tirade to be answered? Was not his Royal Highness well used to be accused of the worst motives? Happily, the blue witches had been stirring their broth in a corridor removed from the dancing halls; so—unusual circumstance—this extra piece of foul linen was washed in private.

Alvanley, beaming with warmth and benignity, broke in upon the operation with an announcement that supper was ready, and begged that the guests would control their evil passions. His Grace of York had long since been carted home, sleeping with stentorous snores. The Prince of Wales was provoked, displeased with himself, with every one; for had he not sworn never again this side of the grave to hear the voice of Caroline, and had she not hissed in his ear words that would rankle? Well, well; there is no use in acting again unpleasant scenes. The waters of Lethe are broad and deep; but are they profound enough to appease the myriads of souls in pain, who clamour for a draught of oblivion? What matters it that three parts of our troubles are homemade? Does that make them easier to bear? Strong wine, generous wine, priceless gifts of the gods! When our heart-strings twang and quiver, we can drown their writhings in the bowl. Doth Fate decree that we shall moan? A fig for Fate! We will be gay, despite her blows.

His Royal Highness claimed the hand of the death-queen, and led her into supper, followed by the horde of roysterers; while the committee stood behind, acting in the capacity of waiters; all but Brummel, who could not bring himself, even in jest, to assume his grand-dad's occupation, and who was, moreover, warned to keep aloof by the frowns of his liege lord.

He saw now the mistake he had made, and was scheming inwardly as to how it might be retrieved. A pill would put his liver right, which was the cause of the trouble. But what bolus might be applied to the indignation of the Prince of Wales? Sitting alone in the deserted dancing-rooms, he considered this; but no reply was vouchsafed to the enigma.

Meanwhile, at the supper-table, the fun grew fast and furious. On the other side of Abigel sat Leoline, and behind lurked watchful Cy, with menace in his mien. Opposite sprawled Vere, who glared and muttered, and tossed off sarcastic toasts to my lord Northallerton—a proceeding which no one noticed. The company was as mixed as the most ardent advocate of the *ridotto* could desire; for Jack Randal whispered broad compliments to the Duchess of Bedford, while Cribb, taking advantage of his disguise, passed an arm about my lady Buckinghamshire, and plied her warmly with champagne. Orgies of this description happily find no place among the pleasures of a more decorous world, but it is to be hoped that, even at the commencement of the century, many fine ladies would have blushed could they have soberly looked down upon themselves in the midst of the wine-stained saturnalia. They were “tiled in,” so to speak, and, within the circle of debauch, allowed themselves and others to take extreme liberties; for was not the blood of all rushing with the same head-

long speed? When all were reduced to a like condition by heat and dancing and drink, what was the use of trying to apply a bridle, which would be intolerably irksome and vexatious? To exorcise the black fiend, his Royal Highness imbibed freely, and pressed his suit with such ardour on the skulled lady as fairly to terrify one who was little given to be frightened.

This was the first masquerade to which Abigel had ever ventured, and she promised herself it should be the last. But the girl was too proud to show how little she was pleased, and forced herself to smile and nod at her guardian when he rapped his glass on the table and bawled, "Now isn't she magnificent?" Haply, she would have risen and fled, but that she felt like a ship in a high sea riding with two anchors. Burly Cy was within call. Under the table she clasped the slender fingers of Leoline; and the hands of both were cold. It was a comfort to think that one trusty henchman stood behind, while a sober friend was sitting by her side—two men whom she could respect, while contempt for all the rest was rising in heavy waves. The conduct of his Royal Highness dismayed Miss Rowe. Of course, she was long since familiarized with the spectacle of gentlemen in all the phases of intoxication. Were not specimens always on view in the Noah's Ark? But somehow it was painful to be obliged to perceive that

he whom a romantic virgin-worship had hoisted on a pedestal could be no better than the rest. His spasmodic throes of maudlin love were distasteful to Miss Rowe; but then she assured herself that, if he knew who she was—after what had passed she refused to doff her mask—he would refrain from unpalatable warmth. Had he not often made love to her before in playful and respectful fashion, as was clearly his duty to all pretty women in his capacity of first European gentleman? Of course, it was all a jest—a broad one, suited to the background and actors, and as such permissible; but, for all that, she was relieved when, supper over, she could escape to dance with Leoline. And while she danced she mused over her idol, and coined excuses for him. Even when half-seas over, he retained his wonderful urbanity. How all-important in this world of skating is charm of manner! It matters little what may lie beneath, since we are seldom called upon in social intercourse to dig below the surface and find out the stuff of which acquaintances are made. Charm of manner is like grease to a wheel, enabling the clumsy vehicle in which we sit to move over the rough road with comparative smoothness. And how important it is to join thereto a sprightliness; to make the journey as pleasant as may be to self and others by taking life lightly. So many of us have a tendency to be over-serious and solemn, to exaggerate trifles, and sing dirges over

petty worries, to the annoyance of our neighbours, who have their own troubles, that jesting, of however idiotic a nature, is surely good for us. Let us talk nonsense, therefore, oh my brethren, *à veste déboutonnée*, and not be too grand to gabble foolishly, pretending to be wiser than he who lives next door.

Abigel, being extremely young and ignorant, was much given to the understanding of people's business better than themselves—extremely sage and liberal in the bestowing of advice; and people smiled and pretended they would take it. For it is amusing to be lectured by cherry lips, specially when their owner is naïve and inexperienced. So she pranced up and down with Leoline, dropping pearls of wisdom at intervals; and he thought how pretty she was, how sweet and low her voice!

The Prince and his following—diminished by two since Brummel and Sherry had fallen both into disgrace—knew better than to sport a toe after a heavy supper. Lord Osmington had not gambled for seven or eight consecutive hours, and was impatient to indulge his favourite vice. He proposed *pam*, therefore, and, ordering a dozen bottles and a screen to a snug corner of the card-room, arranged a cosy party. What happened there no one knew; for the doors were closed, and the *cits* and *madams* were too well brought up to force themselves into the Regent's company. Somebody, in order to kill time, suggested

country-dances, to be varied by reels, until the hour of eight, when coffee and chocolate would be served, and the guests go off to bed. The sinews of youth are as elastic as their spirits. Hour after hour did couples skip up and down the middle and under each other's arms, as if endowed with perpetual motion; but a moment came at length when musicians collapsed, and there was a lull, and partners were glad to move to the side saloon and await the morning refection. Abigel, with Leoline beside her, leaned out of a window in the now deserted ball-room, to drink the early breeze and observe how ugly is the dawn of which the poets rave, amusing herself in childish sport the while by pelting the attendants in the street below with fragments of wax from off her mask. The hideous skull swung from her arm by its strings, a shapeless mass, bereft of floral wreath, and she was telling Leoline that he might walk home with her, and state his views on the road anent the beauties of opening day.

"I used to like the early morning in the country," she remarked, with the condescension of a fashionable lady; "but I'm a woman now, and have learned to know better."

"You enjoy your life of racket and dissipation?" Leo asked, with a wistful look of longing and disappointment. "Since the dear old days, you've left me far behind. Indeed, I think you are transformed—

that another soul has entered in, different from the one that was my comrade."

"We are wide-sundered truly," Abigel agreed; and Leo sighed, for he misunderstood the purport of the remark.

"I am but a page," he thought, "a penniless dependent on royal bounty, far below this brilliant, worldly being." While she, awed by the poetic genius of her companion, considered him as floating in ether.

"Each of us is like a fir tree, with twin leaders," Leo said, "which sprout side by side, apparently of equal strength, one of which will by-and-by be sacrificed."

"I take the idea," replied Abigel. "On reaching maturity, we have a choice between two natures that spring from the same germ, alike yet different; and our future depends upon which of the two we take and which abandon?"

"How quick you are!" returned Leo, in admiration. "On second thoughts, my simile is bad; for, though we may select, the rejected one may never be abandoned. 'Tis a conflict till our eyes are closed, which never ceases—a war between the reasoning element within and the emotional. Of our dual natures, the one is influenced by the sensual, the other by the spiritual element, and the two are for ever sparring. Hence each human creature with a soul is a paradox, and hence arises our interest in studying human character."

Cyrus was leaning on the window-sill, gazing down the perspective of Piccadilly, and listening to the friends' discourse; but at this juncture he started up, and withdrew with a growl. Did they talk in this wise on purpose to exasperate and mystify him? Did they themselves understand what they were talking about? The reasoning and the emotional, the spiritual and sensual! Fiddlededee! What meaningless rubbish! For the thousandth time the pugilist determined to hate Leoline, and wondered what the ladies could see in the windy mountebank. Mischievous Abigel laughed at the unconcealed dudgeon of her cousin, and drew closer to Leo.

"Of my two natures you think that the bad one has the mastery?"

"Not so," answered her companion gently; "but I am sure that the whirlpool in which we now revolve is bad for us. Should we not both have been calmer and better if we had remained at Stratton-on-the-Fosse, and been content to vegetate in obscurity?"

"Fie!" Abigel cried, with a playful tap. "Will all my furtive sowing produce no ambitious crop? You are called by your name, treated by the Princess with consideration. Does not that fire you to conquer as your own that which is given by courtesy? The attitude of my kind guardian at supper was diverting, or would have been were I less a prey to nervousness. He glared at you with a malevolent aspect

that was quite uncalled for ; looked as if he could eat you at a mouthful ; and yet the adversary, who prates sometimes of ousting him, is but little dangerous. And Blunderbore, too—how he scowled ! At me, by-the-by, as well as you ; for which he shall be well punished. Is it not strange that one who is so anxious to bloom in the shade should kindle such fierce enmities ? ”

“ You despise me ? ”

“ No ; but I lose patience. Either a thing is yours by right and is worth fighting for, or it is not, and should be resigned with candour. I would have you don armour like a man, and win or perish ; or openly resign pretensions.”

Leoline’s brow grew sadder. “ How gladly would I, but for my mother’s words ! You deem me weak. In this much I am ; for she was wrong to send me forth on a wild and hopeless quest, and I ought to have the courage to tell her spirit so. By myself I could never fight and win this prize—to you I can admit it—but I can fight, and will, for that which is worth the winning. Unambitious you call me ? Why ? Because I shrink from waging a useless war, in which I must get worsted.”

“ Then some other warrior must fight, I suppose,” returned Abigel, with a tinge of sarcasm, “ while your nameless worship looks on, applauding.”

“ I tell you that I will carve my name when I am

riper, as my Lord Byron has done, whom everybody runs after to touch the hem of his garment."

Abigel looked up with guileless faith, and, touched by the enthusiasm which shone out of her companion's face, was sorry for her harshness. "A poet's career is glorious," she said, "if he have strength to toil up the steep Olympian hill and pluck the bays."

"Believe me, for that task I have the strength, if not for the other."

To be a great poet; that would indeed be fine. A creator with the divine power to people a world with men and women of his own fashioning. The more glorious, since the gift is given to so few. Many try to create, and the result is a sad array of stuffed and deformed pigmies.

"Oh, Leo," cried Miss Rowe, "be a great poet, and forgive a silly girl's peevish chatter. Oh, the lovely legend of Pygmalion! You shall soon be Pygmalion, and I will kneel and adore the perfect beings so soon as you shall have modelled and breathed them into life!"

Abigel, so dictatorial just now, beamed with ecstasy. Hero-worship was a necessity to her large and ardent nature. She had the delightful faculty of dressing up a doll and prostrating herself before it, forgetting whose hands had supplied the finery. And ought we not to envy the mortals who can do this? If a dish to us is silver, what matter if it be plated? He is an

unkind wight who points out the absence of the hall-mark. Not that I would suggest that Leoline was plated. Not a bit of it ; but, as I have had occasion to hint before, he was a round peg in a square hole, of too contemplative a turn to be good at action—one of those persons of whom we are fond, whilst declaring with headshakes that they are their own enemies. Of undoubtedly superior intellect, infinitely above the people among whom he moved, it was quite probable that, under favouring conditions, he might some day seize a pen and produce something that would live. Meanwhile, he felt choked and stifled by his *entourage*, was compelled to drift with the turbid stream, and was low-spirited in consequence, weighed down by a sense of injustice. Abigel remembered Milton and the long years of dreamy pondering whose result was “Paradise Lost,” and beheld in Leo another Milton. To girlish ardour what are years ? Her enthusiasm, kindled from Leo’s, overleaped the gap. On hearing of a thing as to be done, she was apt to consider it as finished, and fly into rapturous transports at the joyful results of an achievement, while it was as yet in embryo.

The young lady was called down by a rude shock from the realms of poesy to earth. The card-party, which had lasted many hours, broke up. The door of the play-room opened, and his Royal Highness issued thence, flushed and tottery, in company with Vere,

who was less steady still. The wrinkles of annoyance were gone, thanks to the charming of the bottle—had given place to grins of unreasoning content.

“Don’t ’pologize, dear boy!” Vere was mumbling thickly. “You’ve won, and honourable man pays. Debt of honour’s sacred. She won’t mind. Try Balmy-Brutal.”

“Who’ll tell her? What fun!” hiccupped his Royal Highness, mightily tickled by something, and blissfully unaware that the august jasey was awry. “There sh’ is, little saucebox. To think I didn’t know her! But we’ll be even. I’ll speak, Vere. Hear what she says.”

“Balmy-Brutal,” solemnly advised my lord.

The two gentlemen piloted each other successfully to the remote window where Abigel sat, and, swaying side by side like willows, leered down at the maiden. Presaging something unpleasant, she rose to move away, as she was in the habit of doing when in the presence of persons who were the worse for liquor, but was nailed to the floor by the words which tumbled from the lips of Lord Osmington.

“All gone,” he spluttered. “Trees must go. Birnam Dunsinane. You, too, my girl—cursed luck!”

“What!” ejaculated Leoline.

“True as gospel,” the Regent affirmed, slapping his royal thigh with a hilarious whoop. “He lost ten thousand to Alvanley, and hearing me declare my

flame for the death-queen, said, 'Demmy, you shall win her if you can, for she is mine.' And then it all came out that it was you. Pretty clever puss to take me in. I like—love you for it. There, didn't I say I'd love you in real earnest? Give me a k-k-kiss."

Abigel's bosom heaved and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, while she struck her palms together, wreathing trembling fingers as she stared at the Prince of Wales. She could not speak, for her voice was gone as under the shock of a douche. The glittering palace in which she reigned, the gilded home which she had learned with careless childlike trust to look upon as hers, had fallen on her head in a cataract of disjointed masonry, and she was stunned. Cophetua had dressed his beggar-maid in silk and velvet, and had turned her out into the street. This was bad enough. For the moment, worst of all, the chief figure in the Walhalla of hero-worship had slipped from his pedestal, and was swaying opposite with bloodshot eyes, a crooked wig, a clammy skin, and breath that reeked of brandy.

Wounded, stupified, the girl gave a long low moan, and would have fallen, but for Leoline, who with flashing eyes and a face of ghastly whiteness clasped her tightly to his breast.

"You ignoble beast! You ruffianly, base miscreant!" he cried, glowering sternly at the intoxicated peer. "What did you pay for her, that like a serf

she is to be bartered in the slave-market? Are you too stupid, too blindly besotted, to read the warning that's writ upon the wall? Must we borrow Mother Guillotine? It is you and hell-hounds such as you who will steep our land in blood, as France was steeped. Already too long-suffering, the patience of the people's at the ebb!"

Lord Osmington, having propped himself with a skill born of long usage in the recessed angle of the window, turned an astonished glare on the bold speaker. Were scathing words like these applied to him, the Earl of Osmington, and by a cockatrice whom he had fêl out of his hand? Here was a pretty state of things! "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings" is all very well; but here was a greater prodigy. A mouse was erect upon hind-legs with a flourish of menacing whisker! The ragged, hungry urchin whom my lord, out of mistaken kindness, had clothed and 'prenticed to a decent blacksmith was developing, as might have been expected, into a miracle of ingratitude. Earl of Northallerton, forsooth! Pah! a vulgar, snappish spitfire. Was it not plain that the waspish churl was a beggar's brat—offspring of a pedlar, a scavenger, a costard-monger—viscous scum? And here was his housekeeper's niece—whose father was a gipsy, and of course a pickpocket—a chit of whom he had been good enough to make a plaything for a while, putting on tragedy

airs like a duke's daughter, preparing for heroics! How wise the man who warned us to distrust first impulses, for they are always good. It served my lord right for doing an unselfish action. It was out of his usual way, and he would, accepting the lesson, never do anything good-natured any more; of that, as he supported himself in the angle, he was murkily determined.

The head of his Royal Highness was stronger than his friend's. Not being so far gone, Abigel's scared look of quailing horror awakened him to a sense of the situation. A woman who respected herself was always safe in his hands. 'Twas unfortunate that there were so few ladies about the Court who did respect themselves. Much would be made of this by the Kensington clique, he reflected, unless it was hushed up. Could the young lady not perceive, he explained, that it was all a drunken frolic, which had been carried too far, perhaps, but was a joke for all that? It became female perfection to take a jest as it was intended, and not to take folly *au grand serieux* with great eyes that were full of thunder. If there was any slavery in the matter, it was H.R.H. who was the slave, not she. Had he not said at supper that he was the slave of beauty? Would the sweet darling, smoothing away that ugly frown, permit herself to be conducted to the tea-room? The clock was marking half-past eight. One dish

of tea and then to roost, forgetting the follies of the night.

Abigel looked sadly at the Prince without answering. The scales had fallen from her eyes. If my lord was capable of staking her at cards, what might he next attempt? Was she not standing amid the ruins of her crumbled palace, surveying its roofless wreck? Could a few soft words from H.R.H. make good the damage done?

"Take me hence, Leo," she murmured faintly; "anywhere except to that house;" and, leaning on the companion of childhood, moved wearily adown the stairs. Her energies were numbed by the revelation of her real position, and the prospect which in her mind's eye she saw; and, unlike the brisk imperious maiden of the past, she allowed Leo to wrap her in a cloak with dull submission, and fasten the hood under her chin. She glided along as one in sleep, with a heavy nightmare conviction that nothing mattered any more. The delicate mental fibres of the girl's being quivered under a sharp and unexpected stab with a soreness that was physical pain, and she was devoured by a craving for solitude, where the dismembered pieces of the puzzle might be gathered together and fitted in a novel shape.

Jolly curves and dimples on the Regent's visage gave place to haggard lines. No one likes to have his professions of love—even when offered in badinage—

flung in his face, neither is it agreeable to be treated with open scorn by a couple of dependent fledgelings. Everything to-night had gone wrong with his Royal Highness. Things were always going wrong, but never so disastrously as now. What an accumulation of regrettable circumstances! Charlotte was obstinate; the mob was rude; Brummel had been mortally offensive, Sherry unpardonably insolent (how dared he say that his master had ratted?); the Dreadful Woman had bearded him—carefully guarded as he was, had obtruded her odious presence under his very nose. And to crown all, here was a coarse piece of foolish nonsense taken seriously, which would be bruited about the town with distortion and piquant *floriture*, and used as a lever by the crafty Megæra for the stirring of new devil's broth. Was not a prince to be pitied who, having attended an evening party in order to forget his woes, had found a new pack awaiting him? Even Vere, crony of old days, and cause of the last misfortune, instead of being contrite and sympathetic, and trying to undo what had been done, was grunting and cursing like a fatuous imbecile, while trying to stand upright on his legs. "Cockatrice!" he was repeating, with that painful effort of the eyebrows to keep the lids raised which is so comical in drunken men. "But's all right—hash settled—the puppy!"

"Whose hash?" demanded the Regent. His own *brain* was growing clear under the pressure of lugu-

brious thought. "No more scrapes, I beg. We've had quite enough for to-night. What's that noise? A brawl below; some men fighting. Really this is too indecent."

The Regent made his way to the landing, and, supported by the banisters, looked down. Most of the guests were gone, but the sparse sprinkling that remained had formed a circle in the hall, in the midst of which three men were buffeting. "Shame, shame!" somebody vociferated. "Two to one!" "They're professional bruisers, by the lord Harry!" shouted another. "I'll back the Pink of Bow!" "I'm for the Sprig of Myrtle!" "Come out of that and let 'em have it out!" yelled a sixth, as, seizing the slightest of the three, he dragged him out of the ring. With angry surprise the Grand Signor beheld two of his own fistic bodyguard, with dominoes in shreds, pummelling away as if at Moulsey Hurst; while in the slight figure, torn and bleeding, he recognized his wife's page, the haughty and plain-spoken champion of Miss Rowe. The appearance of the Prince put an end to the encounter, and he insisted upon being informed as to the cause of so unseemly a disturbance.

"It's a pity," grumbled Caleb Rann, "for I was giving him a hiding, and a real good 'un. Make up a match, gents, and force him to it, the coward! I'll undertake to beat him. When he did me last time I wasn't sober."

"All the world knows I drubbed you!" panted Cyrus. "But have your way. I'm sick of taunts. Osmington House and late hours are bad for us folk. Give me a month's training, and you'll see which is the better man."

"Brag's a poor dog!" sneered his rival.

"If you want another beating, you shall have it," cried Mr. Smalley.

"At fitting time and place," interrupted the Prince of Wales. "The hall of Wattier's at nine a.m. is neither. Who is the aggressor in this squabble, and what has this youth to do with it?"

"Miss Rowe was under my escort, sir," panted Leoline, excitedly; "and we hadn't gone fifty yards when that man and another, who has vanished, hustled us. I struck that one in the mouth, and, for the lady's sake, made the best of my way back here; but on the steps the other tripped me up, and I should have fared badly in the scuffle but for Smalley, who came to my assistance."

"Not for love of you, jackanapes," grunted Cyrus. "But I can't stand by and see foul play, specially when Miss Rowe's concerned. That Rann's a disgrace to our cloth. I've said it behind his back, and repeat it to his face. The idea of a great chap like him, and another lout, waylaying this shrimp! You're low; that's about what you are—low—disgusting low!" And, with this decidedly unfavourable expression of

opinion, Mr. Smalley picked up his torn domino, and, with a bow to his Royal Highness, prepared to go his way.

"Hark to that!" jeered Caleb. "How good we are at bluster! Low or high, I'd have made you sing small, my hearty, if we had not been stopped."

"I'm out of practice," objected Cy.

"Is it to be a match, gents all?" the other asked, with an appealing ogle in his little eyes. "I can take a real beating as well as any man, and like the other all the better for it, if it's straight; but, s'elp me, that other time was unfair—the umpire allowed as much—and it's only proper I should have another chance."

"Yes, yes; it shall be done shipshape," cried Cribb (who had been asleep under the stairs), bustling up, "I give you my honour on it. But what's all this? Shake hands. Don't stand showing your teeth like snarling dogs! Shake hands, I say."

Cyrus deliberately placed his hands behind his back. "I'm damned if I do!" he declared, with sturdy emphasis. "My hand's honest, and clasps no bully's. Why did you dog their steps to a lonely corner, and then try to pick a quarrel, eh? Explain that before the gentlemen."

"It was off the square, surelie, if so be as he did it," admitted Cribb, with a dubious headshake.

"Never you mind why," gibed Caleb, with an ugly

leer of cunning. "You and I serve the same master, and it don't become you to interfere with me or him."

"You were acting by order of Lord Osmington!" exclaimed the Prince of Wales.

"I didn't say so," returned Caleb, sulkily—for he was warned to prudence by the sight of that noble peer creeping with cautious lurches down the staircase. "I never said as I did, and I ain't going to tell what I did or why I did it—there! If you gents like to make a match of it, I'm game; if not, I'll say good day;" and, touching his forelock with a sweeping nod to the assembly, the sphynx-like Rann departed.

"Singular!" the Prince murmured, frowning. "I wonder if it might be? How he pursues this lad! May a man elect to be a rogue from choice? It is strange, and I don't like it."

Leoline uttered a cry. Abigel! Where was she? The last he had seen of her in the confusion of the scuffle was standing on the club steps, with distracted aspect, while tears were coursing down her face. She was gone! By herself—whither? No one had seen her go, but there was no doubt that she had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

AWAKENING.

How vain an amusement is castle-building, and yet how incorrigible we wretched mortals are in piling tier on tier of phantom bricks! I protest that the perusal of biographies is the saddest of recreation, for they all preach the same gruesome sermon, sing the same melancholy carol. They all tell of creatures who hoped on when there was no hope, deceived themselves with impossible illusions, erected and furnished edifices which they were never to inhabit. 'Tis well that the future is triple-veiled from us, or who would escape suicide?

Legendary lore is silent as to the mental sensations of the Sleeping Beauty on receiving that kiss. Did she take up her train of thought where it was left long ago, or, while she slept, was her mind working in dreams—just as the hair and finger-nails of the sleepers kept on growing—landing her at the end of the protracted siesta with quite a different set of thoughts and feelings? Or was she so engrossed

with the sight of the lovely prince that there was no room in her fluttering heart and brain for aught but his image? One thing we do know, which is, that she awoke to joy and delight and everything that was nice, with a prospect of living "happy ever after"—it was fairyland, you know, not this absurd earth of ours—in which she differed from Miss Abigel Rowe, our heroine, whose waking vision was horrified by monster spiders, centipedes, scorpions, what not, immeshed in grisly cobwebs draped with mould.

You have not, thus far, been gratified with very much of the inner workings of our young lady's mind. She has been asleep all this time, accepting pleasant things as they came without much questioning; shutting eyes and opening ruddy lips to receive the juicy cherries, without considering the chances of a snail being popped into her mouth instead of some ripe fruit. She had no absorbing belief in the perfect goodness of human nature, such as some young things enjoy; for early in the day she was made aware that grandaunt Pentecost drank too much whiskey, and could slap with horny palm. But being untroubled so far by the signs of any big wickedness, such as appals us now and then by an abrupt display of its ugliness, she amused herself by looking sternly at small uncertain sins, and tilting at them with a valiant little lance. Thus was it that, as a child, she grew into the habit of lecturing willing Cyrus; and,

deeming Leoline's apprenticeship to be a wrong, she applied her energies to the righting of it. When grandaunt Pentecost sent her up to town, with short, sharp lectures as to how she should behave, the oddness of the situation she was called upon to fill never troubled her young innocence. If it was not right that she should go, grandaunt would not have sent her. Madam Pentecost had been content to warn the girl as to holding her own with proper spirit, a lesson hardly needed by one who was truthful and steady by nature. There were curious doings in London which she could not but see; yet she did not conceive it necessary to scream and run away, for in the days when she was young folks were less squeamish than now. They called spades spades, and openly admitted the existence of things which we pretend to ignore, passing them by quietly without protest, as flowers on the tree of human frailty which must needs bloom, but which we need not pluck; and I doubt very much whether they were any wickeder than we, who double-lock our doors upon our peccadilloes, and prate a great deal about virtue. Just as in the past queen consorts accepted the fact of royal mistresses without a blush, so did honest Abigel accept the Noah's Ark and all its painted inhabitants without a tremor. It was never suggested, by hint or whisper, that she was to hold communion with that contingent of houris; and she was taught by the

example of many ladies of undoubted virtue, that it is inconvenient to be always living in a condition of shocked propriety, and that, if you inhabit Rome, you must tacitly accept the doings of the naughty city. In her eyes the position of adopted daughter to a confirmed libertine did not appear untenable. She did not see much of my lord Osmington when mad drunk, and never saw anything of the houris, except by accident on rare occasions. Her interviews alone with her guardian were generally of a morning, when his tongue was dry and temples throbbing; when he felt prematurely old and crumpled, and had not the spirit or the wish to be rude. Indeed, the contrast of the snowdrop and the tulips pleased my lord, who was unaccountably tetchy about Miss Rowe, and was wont to rap out extra strings of expletives if she was lightly spoken of, vowing that he would have in his life, if he chose, one bit of pure romance. So, with the adaptability of youth, Miss Rowe accepted, in simple faith, a place in the world that was comfortable enough. People told her that when she married, as of course she would and well, the self-appointed guardian would, no doubt, provide a dowry; and, nothing loth, she developed into a woman of fashion, doing as other women of fashion did, honoured by all as the friend of the future sovereign. As we have seen, she went out a good deal into society; was tolerated by the great censor, received by the goddesses

of Almack's. Sure none had a better right to build up phantom bricks. Never before had she attended a masquerade, and promised herself, in the course of the proceedings, that on the morrow she would rate her guardian severely. He ought to have told her what it was like—have advised her to stay away. Long before supper, when the tongues of the guests became unloosed, my ladies Cooper, Castlereagh, and the rest had retired, or Miss Rowe would have thrown herself on their protection. But, then, she felt comforted by the contiguity of Leoline and cousin Cy, and thought she could rely on her own tact to escape insult. Moreover, she was sharp enough to know that nought was to be gained by crying out amid a company who hated prudes. Then, shaken by a rough hand, she woke, and horrid was the waking. The earth was yawning all around, the phantom bricks were showering about her ears, the ground was littered with illusions broken. The man to whom she looked for protection had deliberately staked his charge upon a dice-throw; had actually bartered her away as he might a horse or dog; then, reeling up, had complacently resigned the prize into the hands of a new possessor! The maiden was struck dumb with helpless horror. The equivocal nature of her position smote her like a thunderbolt. Her eyes were opened, and for the first time she saw. The idea that my lord might wish to marry her was

put away long since. Did he not talk of dying a bachelor? What had the pack of libertines, male and female, been thinking of her all this time? No wonder that Pepita and Chiquita should be half crazed with jealousy. She was a lamb that had been daintily fed for future slaughter, and all the world must have seen her in this light. How disgraceful! The Prince of Wales, always so kind and courteous, appraised her as of little worth, or he would not have come prancing out of the play-room with a broad grin upon his sublime countenance to claim his new chattel. All this passed through the unhappy damsel's mind like a lightning flash, and she was scorched and burnt up with shame. Oh, for wings to fly away to the cold far north where human creatures dwell not! White shaggy bears and walruses would be far more desirable companions than wicked, wicked man! Had not Leoline suddenly clasped her; had she not felt his sympathetic hug; seen the indignation in his eyes, there is no knowing what she would have done in the overwhelming horror of despair and helplessness. She would have felt utterly alone and friendless, have jumped out of window possibly to escape from the degrading world; for it struck her as possible that Madam Pentecost might deliberately have sold her niece for a price to a man who, weary already of his bargain, had staked her on a throw. If such were indeed the case, to whom might she fly for succour in extremity? Then

Leoline clasped her in his protecting arms, and his blue eyes, usually so mild and dreamy, glared with rage. In that there was much comfort. So, instead of leaping out of window and breaking her neck, she placed her arm within her playfellow's, and quietly walked away, like the sensible girl she was. But the poor thing's ordeal was not over yet; the bricks were tumbling still. She had vaguely cried, "Take me anywhere, except to Osmington House;" and they were going they knew not whither, when the ruffian Rann, and a still more forbidding colleague with a broken nose and heavy jowl, followed and picked a quarrel. Abruptly awakened, she was morbidly on the look-out for danger. What was the object of these men? Of course to carry her off, beyond reach of help. For his own sake, they could not wish to fight with insignificant Leoline, who craved naught from any one but peace and quietness. No doubt there was a coach hard by, and she would be thrust into it and whisked away. What a wicked world, each path beset with peril! And then, in broad Piccadilly, under the club portico, came the fracas. On her account, men were belabouring each other with sledge-hammer fisticuffs, shrieking out curses, and rolling in the dust and up again, while spectators laughed and clapped. What a scandal! It was too much. Maddened by a sense of degradation and wounded pride, the maiden fled from the scene, a

smitten hind making for the covert, there to lie down and die. With flying feet she sped along, caring not where she went, provided it was out of hearing of the scuffle; and people were too much amused by the combat to mark the direction of her flight. Down the broad thoroughfare of St. James's Street she ran, along the path by the pleasure-grounds of Carlton House, and never stopped until she reached the umbrageous shade of the trees beyond the Mall. There, out of breath, trembling from head to foot, she sank upon a seat, and, pressing cold fingers to her brow, strove hard to think. But her brain was tempest-racked. Whirling round and round, it refused its office. She still saw the handsome Regent, whom once she admired so, prancing towards her with that satyr grin; still heard the thud of fists, the shrill execrations and heartless yells of the bystanders. Placing fingers in her ears, she shuddered down upon the ground, and lay there moaning; while the unfeeling birds, who had not been all night at a *ridotto*, hopped with saltatory frisks from bough to bough, chirping discordant music.

It was all over now—the dream of pleasant possibilities. She was quite, quite alone. The Prince and my lord were friends. Even Leoline and Cy were odious; for they formed part of the horrid limning, which might never be sponged from out her memory.

Incongruous, idle visions flitted by, seen as in a glass darkly, owing to the vividness of that other picture that was burnt in with red-hot irons. The pilgrims of the *Mayflower*, on a rippling sea, with bellying sails filled by a jocund breeze. Happy pilgrims! Sodom and Gomorrah were out of sight, never to be again revisited. Their faces were turned towards the brilliant west, to a land that knew them not. Ah, what a pure and joyful prospect! Abigel's soul yearned for a land that knew her not; for the companionship of a people who would never hear of that degrading scene, that uprising of mud wherewith she was smirched for ever. In the first fierce reaction after the stunning blow, each palpitating sinew wrenched and tore. Oblivion—nothing but oblivion—could salve this wound. It was her turn to cry for Lethe. If some one just then had held out a poisoned chalice, how gladly would she have gulped the draught!

By-and-by, while the booming of a distant sea dulled her perceptions, she became aware that something intercepted the warm morning sunshine, and looked up. A tall lady, in a wide-brimmed black hat, with drooping feathers, was smiling down at her, and holding forth a slender hand, in which there was no chalice—a beautiful lady of mature years, whose luxuriant brown hair was streaked with silver, around whose stately head the aureole of sorrow shimmered.

Abigel knew her well by sight, and had learned to venerate her name ; but the two had never spoken. Now the sweet smile, chastened by vanquished pain, seemed to pour balm on her own trouble. Who may look upon the rugged furrows—scars of an anguish that is past—without humbly doffing the hat in reverence, and praying that, when our turn arrives, we, too, may conquer ? We pass, as it were, a-tiptoe with bated breath, as we would a corpse ; for there is something awful in the calm patience which has triumphed, surmounting earthly grief.

The mind of the maiden quivered less, and her heart went out to the lady.

“Miss Rowe, I think ?” the latter said. “I’ve admired your beauty often.”

“Mrs. Fitzherbert !” ejaculated Abigel.

“You are out betimes. I, too, am enjoying my morning walk. At Brighton I always take my exercise while others are abed.”

It was plain by her attitude and deep despondency that something was amiss with Abigel, but Mrs. Fitzherbert was not one to intrude upon another’s confidence without encouragement. Gazing from her balcony on the busy Steine, she had frequently seen Miss Rowe surrounded by admirers, had heard her dubbed Euphrosyne ; and, worldly-wise, had wondered how a career would end, so odd yet bright in its *beginning*.

"I have been out all night," Abigel said. "Not in the streets; perchance 'twould have been better if I had! This plain white frock is a gala robe."

"Ah, what can we not do when we are young?" said the older lady. "Once I, too, could dance all night, and next day be fresh as a lark. My heart and feet were equally light once; but that was long ago. Where was your party?"

"At Wattier's club."

"A masquerade!" said Mrs. Fitzherbert, looking disapproval.

"Not a fit place for me, you think?" responded Abigel. "What does it signify? A girl's repute is a frail shallop. The sooner suspense is ended by its foundering, the better for the pilot."

Mrs. Fitzherbert pressed her lips together and was silent.

"I suppose, as we're dropped down here without volition of our own," the girl remarked bitterly, "there's no harm in studying our pig-stye?"

"You have studied," asked the other, "and learnt what?"

"That the world is hollow; that all men are knaves."

"Avoid extremes," replied Mrs. Fitzherbert, with warmth. "Believe me, who have seen much of the world; though there is much knavery, no doubt it is a form of madness. How would our globe get on

unless goodness was the natural tendency of all sane minds ? ”

“ You can think that ! ” cried Abigel, surprised.

“ Yes. Without such a creed, I could not consent to live. We must be indulgent to the mad and pity them, and steady our own minds with engrossing occupation. Thank Heaven, I have a sweet girl whose training engrosses all my interest.”

“ I have seen Miss Seymour. Giddy fool that I have been, skating over ice without caring to gauge the depth below ! Leoline was right : retirement and obscurity are the better part.”

“ Success is certainly a snare, for the prizes in the mundane lottery are gained more often by our sins than by our virtues ; but such sentiments are more becoming in me than in you, for you are on the threshold of your life, while the shadow of the closing door is upon mine. Is there anything that you would like to say ? ” Mrs. Fitzherbert continued gently. “ Your hand is feverish. Are you not well ? How hot your brow ! Lean upon me—so.”

Abigel nestled close to the elder lady in her fresh morning dress, and, laying a weary head upon her shoulder, poured forth her artless tale. The recital did her good, and she felt strangely better, accustomed as she was to manage others and order them about. Mrs. Fitzherbert listened with drawn lips, and remained for a time in reverie.

"A singular tangle," she said at last. "Sure my lord Osmington ere this is penitent. We must recollect that he was not sober."

"Go back to him? Never!" cried impetuous Miss Rowe. "It is no longer possible. Thanks to him, I have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of evil, and I know too much. The glitter of this town is loathsome to me now. I abhor its sin and my own uselessness. What has been may never be again. A broken bell may peal no more with full deep sound. I am another woman."

"But what will you do? Never was maid so strangely circumstanced. You have had the education of a lady of rank; have been brought up to mingle with the noblest in the land. Given that you are prepared to renounce all this, what then?"

"I will work. I should be so glad to work. How horrible is a woman's uselessness!"

Mrs. Fitzherbert smiled as she patted the flushed cheek. "'Twould be hard," she said, "for one who's shone at Almack's to turn dairymaid. Even that requires 'prenticeship, or the pail will be kicked over. Or would you teach the juvenile idea? Or will you parade the street, singing, 'Buy my moss roses and dainty sweet-briar'?"

Abigel bit her lip and hung her head. Lord Osmington's patronage was, indeed, an empty boon. Under his auspices she had been educated in little

that could be of practical utility. 'Twas cruel to have taught her nothing but what was above her proper station.

"I will do anything," she cried, with vague decision, "that will draw me from myself. Oh for some hard work to occupy my mind!"

"In these degenerate days," returned the other, "a lady can do naught but tambourwork. Men have hosts of outlets for their energies whereby they may escape from themselves; a girl must be content to sit at home and gnaw her heart. A pity you were not married ere it came to this."

"I will marry Cyrus!" cried rueful Abigel. "My cousin worships the ground I tread on."

"A farmer, I suppose? Can he support a wife?" asked Mrs. Fitzherbert; and Miss Rowe turned scarlet. Somehow she could not confess to this refined lady that Mr. Smalley, whom she proposed to honour, was a pugilist. "Come, trust in me," said Mrs. Fitzherbert, presently. "Remember that rank herbs make the best medicines, and that grief is poor diet. Your case is curious and interesting, and I will do for you that which I thought never to have done." There was a sombre look in Mrs. Fitzherbert's eyes which frightened Abigel.

"Nay, you shall do naught for me that would cause pain," she cried.

"*He* is in part responsible for this," the other

murmured; "and I am more jealous for his good name, alas! than he is himself. Listen. You are alone and friendless, as you say; for the world's butterflies care not if you live or die. Trust to me, then, to set this straight. I will communicate with the Prince of Wales"—here the sweet voice quavered a little. "He would not wish, I know, that an innocent young life should be wrecked by an instant of folly. Lord Osmington owes you reparation; for no man has a right to pluck a maiden from her sphere, unfit her for her station, then fling her forth to perish."

"Oh, indeed, indeed," entreated Abigel, while, unruddered and confused, she succumbed to a calmer will, "I could not go back to him—never! Sure, if a person who has contributed to my happiness at one time makes me wantonly wretched at another, I am under little obligation to him. I owe a duty to myself. Pray do not ask me to return."

"I ask you now to come with me, as my guest. Will that be too terrible an infliction? Then we will see what is to be done, and trim our sails accordingly. Your inclination shall not be forced. Do you refuse?"

Miss Rowe looked up into the beautiful, sad face, and her eyes were filled with tears. "Refuse? How fortunate is Miss Seymour!" she sobbed. "My mamma died, like hers, when I was a little thing, and I never found another!"

The two ladies strolled hand in hand across the Park to a house by the river-side. Miss Seymour was watering some flowers at an open lattice, and as soon as she discerned the lady with the large hat and feathers she waved a gladsome greeting.

CHAPTER XIII.

BY THAMES SIDE.

UNDER the auspices of Miss Seymour and her new protectress, Abigel recovered from the shock which had so grievously distracted her, and to all outward appearances became herself again; but scales when they have fallen may not be replaced, and Abigel, though given to laughter as of yore, had serious moments of brooding ill-suited to her years. A few days after the *ridotto*, Mrs. Fitzherbert, who had taken time to consider the matter in all its bearings, despatched her young ladies on a distant errand, and, left alone, set about a careful toilet, and prepared to receive a visitor. Having retired from gay society, she dwelt entirely at Brighton now, receiving old friends during the season, occupying herself at other times with the education of Miss Seymour. The grand mansion in Tilney Street had changed hands long since, and whenever it became necessary to visit London she put up at this quiet cottage by the water-side at Westminster, where an old servant of hers let lodgings.

She sat and waited, pretending to read a book ; but her thoughts were far away, digging among the years that were buried, gazing at each fossil fragment as she turned it up, looking on it with calm survey, as if it had not once been soaked with her heart's blood, drenched with her tears. She had been disciplined in the great school, and was wont to declare that nothing could touch her now ; and yet when she heard a well-remembered step upon the gravel, listened for the familiar knock, she was forced to press a hand upon her heart to still its fluttering.

"Maria," cried the Prince of Wales, who, perceiving the delicately chiselled profile he had, loved so well, entered the parlour by the open window, "Maria, I am so glad——" The words died upon his lips. The beauish swing with which he arrived gave way to a less elastic gait ; the flood of the past swept over him. That was brackish, but not quite unpleasant. The momentary flush on the cheek of his old love faded into pallor as Mrs. Fitzherbert held forth her hand with a sad smile.

"You find me aged," she said. "I'm quite an old woman, while you bear your years right gallantly. Our sex has the worst of it in all the affairs of life. It was kind of you to come. I thought we should never have spoken to one another any more ; but I was wrong in that, you see, as in so many other things. We have heard all about the masquerade!"

She shook a finger, as at a boy caught apple-stealing, and the Regent looked annoyed.

"Of course," he complained, "you've heard all the harm that woman's friends can tell of me. Scandal travels fast. It was a stupid business, and I'm more disgusted than I can say. To make it worse, the silly girl has run away and drowned herself—for fear of me, I suppose. They used not to think me so repulsive."

"Too true, alas!" sighed Mrs. Fitzherbert.

"How can a man with feelings help himself, if they will throw themselves at his head?"

"How indeed! The prodigy who abstained from throwing herself at your head is here."

"Here!" cried the Regent, starting. "And you've sent for me——"

"Not to surrender your lost property. She's your own, I presume, since you won her. *Fidonc!* I've despatched her on an errand, and she won't be back for hours. She is alive and well, and has not committed *felo-de-se* on your account; so set your mind at rest. But you and that bad man owe her something. I've thought it over. It will be best for the girl to resume her place for a while, if Lord Osmington will promise to behave decently. What are his intentions with regard to the poor thing? That is what I call on you to discover, and to use your influence also with regard to a marriage with somebody or

other, if not with him. After this *esclandre* she must be married as soon as possible. If you gave the hint, Lady Castlereagh, I'm sure, would see to it; for she likes the girl, and her position is ridiculous."

The Regent glanced sideways at his old love with a whimsical smile. What inveterate matchmakers are women, even when they have burned their fingers! Here was an elderly party discussing the fascinating necessity of marriage with commonplace deliberation, as though she had not had too much of it in her own person; as though the tying of the nuptial knot had not caused her own discomfiture and led to unutterable disaster.

"Why you should be so deeply interested, I don't know," he remarked; "but it shall be as you wish."

"It is on your account I am interested. To save you from your own imprudence. You've enough on your conscience, I should think, without the addition of this girl's undoing!"

"Then you still care?" the Regent whispered softly. "Oh, Maria, when I got your message my soul leaped, for I hoped——"

"Hoped?"

"That perhaps—perhaps you had changed your mind, and would come back to me. Practically I'm a widower, you know."

Mrs. Fitzherbert withdrew the hand which the Prince had pressed to his lips, and a severe look

settled on her face. "Will blundering men never learn to read us?" she exclaimed. "I can forgive you, as one can forgive all to the being who holds one's heart, and can bow to hard necessity, but I cannot forget Fox's speech in Parliament. How could I go back to you, after his formal declaration of my infamy?"

"Before God we are man and wife, and never can be otherwise," George murmured, clasping the lady's hand again, and twirling a quaint split ring, with a date engraved on it, that she wore upon her finger. "My father has the wreck of both our lives to answer for, and is suffering for it now. I am worse off than you, Maria."

"You are not happy? When I gave you up I acted for the best. A member of my Church ought never to have married one of yours. In that we sinned, and are both punished."

"Not you, not you!" exclaimed the Regent with emotion. "You are the best woman I have ever known, the only one I really ever loved; and yet I've proved your ruin. Unfortunate, ill-starred wretch! Our union was not legal by the law of England, but I might have remained true to you, and stood steadfast by your side, instead of giving way. My father brutally deceived me——"

"Hush, hush! Let sleeping dogs lie. I could live content if you were happy."

"Happy!" scoffed the Regent, lashed by a sense of undeserved misfortune. "Never was a man so miserable, so misconstrued. Even the Pavilion is made a vehicle for abuse. If I choose to erect an Oriental palace, why shouldn't I? A subject like Byron can be Greek, and everybody's pleased, declaring him amusingly eccentric; if I elect to be Turkish, I'm set down at once as mad and a fool. Oh, Maria, I wish I were a fish!"

"A fish?"

"Yes. They've no cares, and no one worries 'em. Have you ever strolled along a riverbank and watched the contemplative trout indolently sucking down his flies, placidly restful, and at ease? No domestic anxieties even; no troublesome wives or daughters. Having laid her eggs, the mother swims away, and there's an end of it. Should enemies eat up her nursery, what pang can wring a parent's heart whose affection has to be dissipated over an annual family of three hundred thousand? Real joy or pleasure is said not to exist here below; but if, as has been sometimes asserted, joy consists in the absence of sorrow, then are the fishes eminently joyful, and I'd give my crown to plash in the sea-deeps along with 'em. I seem to laugh, Maria, but 'tis like Beaumarchais' Figaro, lest I should weep. I'm tied to that dirty Blowsalinda, and you babble of happiness! She writes me such letters—such letters; and, what is

worse, distils poison into Charlotte's ear against her father. And her private life and low favourites! A delicate-minded woman like you cannot dream of it. My life might be better, no doubt; but hers! The people are in ignorance of what that woman is, and I'm not allowed to tell 'em; that's what wrings me most. Ministers care nothing for what I suffer; for a royal personage, they think, is only a wooden block to hang a crown on. But I'm a man as they are, and claim the indulgences due to human weakness under temptation, and I've been harried and tormented to the extreme verge of endurance. I'll have a divorce—I will, in spite of all of 'em. That termagant shan't have it all her own way!"

It was seldom that the Prince of Wales could thus unburthen himself of his secret load, and the incoherent discharge did him good, as he paced up and down upon the hearthrug; and the tears gathered on the cheeks of his listener.

"In years to come," she said, "people will learn what she was like, and be sorry for you."

"Much use," snapped the Prince, "after I'm dead and gone."

"Popular verdicts as to the character of historical persons are often wrong," reflected Mrs. Fitzherbert, "and have to be set right by the clearer vision of posterity. Marie Antoinette's is a case in point. She was incorrigibly idle, frivolous, ignorant, bigoted,

vindictive, rejecting all counsel; yet she occupies a shrine for the present—at least, in public esteem; for the general world can only see how tragic was her destiny. Martyrdom condones the rest. So was it with Mary Stuart, who was—we know it now—an immoral, false, and bloody woman. The scaffold covers a multitude of sins. If Elizabeth is permitted to look down on earth, how she must regret having chopped off her rival's head! The world is hood-winked for a time. People have wilfully set up a fictitious Caroline, who by-and-by will be seen in her true colours."

"You are right, Maria, as you always are," sighed the Prince of Wales. "No one would have thought anything of Charles I., or much of Louis Seize, but for the glamour of the block. But it is hard, isn't it, that one can't be thought well of without losing one's head?"

"A living martyrdom does not do as well?" smiled Mrs. Fitzherbert. "It is very unfortunate. People stir up differences between you, too, for selfish purposes. 'Tis a game of battledore and shuttlecock; if the quarrel falls to the ground, it is instantly picked up again."

"I believe you think that my eyes are jaundiced with regard to that female," cried the Regent. "Here's her last letter to Charlotte, happily intercepted; a nice one from a mother! Will you hear

it? Nay, but you shall. Here's what she writes to our daughter: * 'Then I opened my sorrows, dearest child, to the King, who said, "I will befriend you; but my family will prove my ruin. They care for nothing except their ease, and sooner or later will lose the crown by improper conduct. The disposition of my son George"'—(that's me, Maria, and written to my child)—"'is unrelenting. . . . My son is so lascivious, that if you would attempt to hide his defects they would speedily become more apparent.'" (Here there's something nice about my brother.) '. . . Then I answered with much warmth, "Does your Majesty mean to say that his Royal Highness had issue that was not acknowledged?"' (Do remember, Maria, that this is for the benefit of a virgin of eighteen.) "'I do indeed," replied the King; "and though the affair has hitherto been kept from the public, it must and will be made known." My dear Charlotte will conceive how much I felt on such singular explanations . . .' and so on, with as much more family unpleasantness as she could rake together to assault the nostrils of a young girl. And this is the mother whom Charlotte is bidden never to desert, who is flaunted at me by a virtuous populace as a persecuted angel whose conduct I should admire! I've nearly had enough, though.

* This letter is authentic: subsequently printed in her memoirs by Lady Anne Hamilton, who was a friend and staunch supporter of the Princess of Wales.

God forgive me! I get so desperate as to seek forgetfulness in drink and riot. Some day, I suppose, one will grow callous."

"Poor fellow!" Mrs. Fitzherbert said. "But for your father, how different it might all have been! But we must not rail at the stricken man. Your trial is heavy, yet would it not be better to strive to extract good out of it, instead of evil?"

"I'm not purified and fit for heaven, like you. They've done their best to make a devil of me." The Prince of Wales stared gloomily out at the glittering river, with its freight of boats with gleaming sails and ponderous black barges and shooting wherries; and Mrs. Fitzherbert surveyed with an inaffable tenderness his clouded face.

"I tell you, I'm sick of it," he repeated. "When you subtract sleep and our toilette, how very little of our lives we live, and of that brief span how very little there is that is not disagreeable! I find in every day a large preponderance of worry, a microscopic speck of satisfaction. Among other things, they say that I am selfish. Maybe I am. It is difficult for one in my position not to be selfish. I'm sure I'm always kind and affectionate to those who are kind to me. To a genial nature such as mine, you've no notion how dreadful it is to be hated. If I'd had better parents, I might have been better. A young man's development depends so

much upon his mother, and mine is made of wood."

"Poor dear Florizel!" Mrs. Fitzherbert thought, as she gazed at the man for whom her life was sacrificed. There was a puffiness under the eye that no art could conceal, and crow's-feet too; but how handsome he was still! In truth, the presents of the wicked fairy had counterbalanced the other christening gifts. In the old, old days, when he was a vision of all that could captivate a woman, he was floundering and buffeting always. To some it is not given to rest until the last long silence, perhaps not even then. They cannot escape the turmoil, but must go on tilting, without a break, at foes of their own fashioning. But he loved the old love still, in spite of her white hair. The sneering detractors were wrong, who accused him of caring for nothing but himself and his frogged surtout and new-curled jasey. He might, tempted by a cunningly ejected wave of perfume, have stepped aside to cull here and there a willing blossom; but in the inmost shrine, the holy of holies, that no vulgar eyes might see, the faded rose was treasured, worshipped yet, despite its shrivelled leaves and loss of colour. Sure 'tis the loftiest compliment that man can pay to woman, forgetting externals thus, willingly to wear the withered garland, keeping its vanished charms in fond remembrance. Mrs. Fitzherbert was grateful,

and glad she had sent for him, and, womanlike, set herself to improve the occasion with a lecture. Dear delightful ladies, you have many advantages over us inferior men! You are speckless, spotless seraphs, clad in white samite—wonderful! But you have one little speck, like Achilles—a blemished heel. You are generous, forgiving, amazingly devoted; but miserable males can beat you in one thing: they can avoid improving an occasion. There is not an individual woman that can. No, not one; not even the best. We arrive, all torn and ragged, having tumbled on our face and cut our trouser knees, and beg a wet sponge to mop our bleeding nose withal, and no hand can mop more deftly. But while the process is going on, can the darling refrain from a sermon, accentuating our disaster with untoward remarks that have not the merit of originality? No. A man, though he may not mop so cleverly, will abstain from telling you that your trouser knees are cut (as if you did not know it), and that your bruised nose will be bulbous for a fortnight, and that your eyes will certainly be blacked. Not so a woman. She will, with minute severity, review each rent, rate you with stupidity for tumbling, as though you had of malice aforethought prostrated yourself on the flints for the express purpose of injuring your proboscis.

“You were always so imprudent!” the elderly lady *said*. “Never could keep out of debt. I know that

at this moment you are pressed for money. Poor soul, many of your faults are such as, with skilful pruning, might have been trained to virtues! The inevitable fell on us, and we must endure its weight; but many of the extra straws you've piled on your own back."

"Can I help it?" retorted the Regent, wheeling tartly. "We're constantly paying forfeit for things we can't help. That's what I complain of. All blood is red; but it doesn't flow in the same manner through the veins of desperate men as in beings calm enough to reason; yet both are judged by the same standard. Money! Oh, how I loathe money! To Jack pecuniary affairs come quite natural; he manages his purse without any trouble, and there's always a guinea at the bottom: while Tom, who's cleverer than Jack, can never master the rudiments which Jack finds so simple. The very first rules are Hebrew and Chaldaic; he is born without comprehension of such things, and is always in a mess. I can't understand money, no more can many others. 'Tis monstrously unfair. Let us hope that in another world this itching, constant irritation of a lifetime will be set off against venal transgressions."

"And your advisers are no wiser than yourself, and never were," smiled Mrs. Fitzherbert. "Indeed, 'twas ever the old tale of the blind leading the blind into the ditch. If I can't forgive Charles Fox, no

more should you ; for, much older than yourself, he led you to the gaming-table, and taught you shocking habits, and tied that millstone round your throat which never may be shaken off. How many times did I go to Hamlet's to pawn my jewels for you ? If you only were surrounded by a better *entourage* ! That's one of the things in which you are partly to blame. You have an unlucky knack of drawing to yourself the least reputable people. Lord Osmington, for instance. Why Lord Osmington, who hasn't a good point, and is responsible for much of your unpopularity ? While as for some of the others, they are glaringly unfit friends for the Heir-Apparent."

"I've just given two their *congé*," replied the Prince. "Sheridan has grown offensive. It grieves me, but in his state 'tis best to keep him from the public view. His wit is gone. There's nothing left of my old friend but a foul carcase. The lamp is out, and naught remains but the stench."

"Unfruitful talent," murmured the lady. "Genius misapplied, fame without reverence, age without respect. What an epitaph ! And the other ?"

"George Brummel."

"Brummel ! Why ? He's silly and affected and transcendantly insolent ; no worse."

"Far worse in my eyes. The other night he permitted himself to speak of you with disrespect. That may not be pardoned."

There was a pause, and Mrs. Fitzherbert's heightened colour showed that she was not dead to flattery. It was kind to overset the favourite of the hour for unseemly words spoken of the old love.

"Thank you," the lady said quietly. The evident gratification that shone from her pale face encouraged the Regent to press the matter that lay deep down within his breast.

"Maria," he whispered, "don't answer now. You've given your earthly happiness to me, and, like a selfish man, I accept the sacrifice—can even demand of you another, which you surely will not refuse. You complain of my advisers. I know that some of them are bad. I'm distressed about Vere, for he's shown symptoms of late that look very queer and crooked. No one knows me as you do, or ever has influenced me so much for good. In your presence I feel a better man, for you are the ghost of my better self. Forget Fox's speech; reconsider your decision, and come back to me."

"As your mistress, when I am your wife? For shame! You admit that I've bestowed on you my earthly happiness: is not that enough? I have no more to give. My memory when we both are gone is sacred. The truth may be known then, of me as of others. By-the-by, it is well that I should tell you this. My marriage papers are out of my hands, deposited in the care of my lord Albemarle, that my

name may be sacred from calumny when our voices shall be silent. Sir Arthur Wellesley and he have accepted the trust. The documents are in safe custody at Coutts's Bank."

Now, the Prince of Wales was not one to care about the verdict of posterity. The present and its lies and misrepresentations were more than enough for him, and it seemed idle sentimentality to fuss about marriage proofs which were never to be displayed in life. What does it matter what folks say when your ears are deaf? Deeply as he respected the lady by his side, he deemed her care in this matter to be puerile; but, taking the hint which her fancy appeared to convey, he acted on it forthwith. "Would you give me a pleasure?" he said, with the bright open smile that thrilled her with old memories. "Accept a peerage; that would set you straight before the world. I'm not king yet, but it could be managed."

"And be added to the list of royal concubines?" asked the lady. "Along with Yarmouth-Walmoden and her Grace of Kendal! No, indeed. I've done nothing to cast a slur upon the name of Fitzherbert, and the name of a true-hearted gentleman is good enough for me, since I may not wear yours. I have something more to say. Charlotte, does she care for her unhappy mother?"

"She detests me," responded the Regent, grimly, "and in that is a loyal daughter of Caroline's."

"Is it not true that you have been harsh with her? Remember your own fate, and be tenderly considerate. Many rumours are abroad——"

"I wish Rumour were throttled! Have I not complained of the unending falsehoods——"

"Say that they are falsehoods, and I will rest content. Promise me that you will not compel the child to assume unwelcome bonds. Promise me this, that at a future day you may be spared remorse. Promise me!"

"A disobedient, rebellious baggage! Well, I promise. You force what you will from me, but give nothing in exchange. The ice has been broken, and by you, and I am grateful. Seeing how docile I am, sure we may meet sometimes?"

"What would the Marchioness of Hertford say?" replied Mrs. Fitzherbert, with a gleam of mischief. "Nay, I've no objection to her ladyship, except that I would she were more disinterested. Her counsel is shrewd enough, but she clucks for the behoof of that carroty chick of hers, caring more for him than for your Highness. No," she continued, resuming the subdued manner that had grown habitual; "there is a barrier betwixt us that may never be overpassed. When my girl comes out, I shall return to the world till such time as she may be established. Though we may meet, 'twill be better not to speak; for I could not bring myself to prattle to you, of all men, about the rain, or the sun, and the state of the thermometer."

But I will look into your eyes, and you may know, if you care still to know it, that I love you, while I seem indifferent, as I have always loved you ; and that when malice speaks, the venomous words sweep by unheeded. I have lain upon your breast, and I can count the beatings of your heart as well as I can my own, and have learned to divide the chaff of your heedless follies from the wheat of your kindly nature. And now, good-bye. When the girls return, they must not find you here."

The Regent parted the silver hair and stooped to kiss the furrowed brow; and Mrs. Fitzherbert inclined her proud head to the embrace—simply, as a fond sister might to the kiss of a cherished brother.

"Maria," he whispered hoarsely, "do you remember the diamond that I had sawn in half to cover our two lockets? Where is yours?"

"Here, round my neck," the lady murmured.

"And mine," returned the Prince. "It will be found when I am dead, and buried with me in my coffin. God bless you, dear! My dearly loved Maria!"

And the Regent, with unaccustomed moisture in his eyes, walked rapidly away; while Mrs. Fitzherbert sank back in her armchair, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of a good hearty cry—an unusual condition of breakdown for one so disciplined, which terrified *the girls* no little when they presently returned.

“What is it?” inquired Miss Seymour, kneeling with arms twined about her friend. “Has anything distressful happened?”

“No, child,” the other answered. “I’m happier, that’s all, than I’ve been this many a day.” And then she murmured to herself with gladness, as she looked upon the boats and glancing river, “He is mine yet, faithful in spite of my worn face and my white hair—mine still—and will love me to the end! Will love me to the end, thank God!”

Mrs. Fitzherbert gauged him aright, who was sneered at by carping critics as the acme of fickleness; for to the end George was true to her. On his deathbed the King spoke anxiously to his Grace of Wellington, imploring him to see that the tiny chain about his neck, which bore a precious freight, was allowed to linger there. The duke fulfilled his trust. The lock of bright brown hair, covered by the half diamond, was inclosed within the coffin, and is lying now upon the dust that once was George IV.

END OF VOL. I.

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